

Ark Volume 12

Act 1: Pets will grow with food and affection?

“Eh? What is this?”

Perplexity rang out through the dark cave.

“It was clearly here.....”

Ark looked around with confusion. He checked the features, looked at the map and thought back through his memory. It was impossible he went to the wrong cave. But he couldn't find a passage no matter how hard he looked. There were just rocks blocking the front.

“What on earth is going on?”

Ark sat down with a frustrated expression and was locked in his thoughts. Ark was currently located south of the capital city of Schudenberg Kingdom, Selebrid. There was a reason Ark left his new business in Lancel village and came all the way here to visit the organization with a long history in assassinations, the Dark Brothers. The trials which appeared in front of Ark.....he determined that the quests <Study the Mirage> and <The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree> needed the Dark Brothers' help in order to succeed. Of course, gathering forces inside a game wasn't an easy task. But not long ago, Ark had helped suppress a rebellion which increased his intimacy with the Dark Brothers. He also grasped the situation in the Netherworld and came up with a justification to convince the Dark Brothers.

‘It the negotiations proceed as I expect then it will be possible to succeed!’

However there was an unexpected hitch in Ark's plan. He gained entrance to the Dark Brothers' hidden stronghold Salrin's Towers through the secret passage connected to Nabein's hideout and the location to receive assassination requests. That was also the cave where Ark was currently sitting. But it wasn't there. The passage which was clearly there before wasn't visible anymore.

‘It is impossible to move the towers and everybody inside.....so why is the entrance blocked? Did something happen in the meantime? Maybe they fled because their home base was found by a professional hunter organization.....’

If so, it was quite frustrating.

‘No, it can't be that.’

Ark shook his head. The Dark Brothers had been active in the darkness for hundreds of years. If there were serious friction with users or another NPC organization then Selebrid which was close by would be buzzing like a beehive. However, he visited Selebrid before coming here and it was quiet.

‘Then the Dark Brothers didn’t suddenly flee somewhere else. They’re still here. They just blocked the entrance for some reason. But if they blocked the entrance then how would the hundreds of people in their organization leave? In other words.....there is another passage!’

A smile formed on Ark’s mouth.

‘I don’t know why they’re hiding the entrance but I won’t back off just from this.’

That’s right. Although the entrance was blocked, their home base was still around here so the assassins would scout the forest. Of course, they used ‘Stealth’ in avoid to avoid most people’s eyes. But it didn’t matter if they could hide using ‘Stealth.’

“Radun, search the area using Stalking.”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

When Ark exited the cave and gave the order, Radun instantly jumped down from his waist. Then it raised its head and searched the area with its tongue.

-Radun has used ‘Stalking.’

Within an hour, the footprints of all the life forms passing through the forest were found. As expected after activating the skill.....no, more footprints appeared than he expected. Thanks to that Ark’s expression became even more frustrated.

‘That’s right, this area is south of Selebrid.’

Of course there would be a lot of movement of users and NPCs. On the other hand, Radun’s stalking couldn’t specify a particular target and could only search for all the traces around. There were dozens and even hundreds of footprints all over the place so it was impossible to find the assassins’ traces.

“Unbelievable.”

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak?

Its skill had succeeded so Radun waved its tail expecting a compliment. However Ark had sighed so Radun's eyes seemed to convey 'Dad, did I do something wrong?' Ark laughed bitterly and stroked Radun's head.

"No, you did well. It's just troublesome seeing so many footprints."

'But it did not help? Right?'

"It's still better than having no clues."

'I'm sorry, Dad. I'm a useless snake.'

Radun was almost in tears at this point while Ark continued stroking its head. If Dedric or Razak saw this scene, they would complain but it was a common scene. His ten fingers would become sore from scratching. Sometimes it would become so sore that the senses in the fingers would dull. Therefore Radun's affection for Ark was always at 120%! Now he could guess what Radun was saying just by looking in its eyes. Of course, whether it was painful or not everybody needs 10 fingers.....

'Well, I can't just sit here staring at the footprints so I should look everywhere else.....'

Ark sighed and moved his body.

"Eh?"

Ark looked at the footprints and suddenly realised something strange. So far, Ark had never questioned the footprints Radun found. Thus he had never worn a doubtful expression. However, he realized something after seeing hundreds of footprints gathered in one place.

'.....Some of the footprints look slightly different!'

Wasn't it like looking for objects in a hidden picture? The first time it was hard to see the different before after a while it started to become noticeable. Ark was the same. Once he noticed that the footprints were different, the differences were clearly revealed.

'That's right, there are many different types of shoes in New World. And the physique of the user or NPC wearing the shoes is also different. It is natural for the footprints to look different depending on the physique and shoe type. If that's the case?'

A scene he saw in a foreign drama flashed through Ark's head. It was the US drama popular in a long time ago, CSI! In that show, the crime scene investigators looked at the killer's physique, personality, habits etc. in order to figure out a lot of information. He remembered a scene where the investigator was smug and said 'A footprint is like a second fingerprint.'

Couldn't that also be applied to New World?

'This isn't CSI but I should be able to figure out some basic information.'

Ark surveyed the footprints again thanks to his idea and made some deductions.

"Let's see.....the depth of this footprint is shallow but the form is still intact. It's clearly a cloth shoe so the profession should be magician or merchant? On the other hand, this footprint is quite deep. They should be wearing clunky shoes with a lot of weight so it should be a warrior or knight profession. I'm looking for an assassin so they should be wearing leather shoes. It isn't here. Radun, please search a little bit more."

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak!

Radun suddenly became lively at Ark's command and moved around while shaking its tail. And it found even more footprints in the surrounding area.

"Okay, this is it! For sure!"

Ark used the conclusions he previously figured out to eliminate the footprints one by one. He was looking for footprints that seemed to be from leather shoes. But leather shoes were worn by a lot of regular NPCs and users. Ark also wore leather shoes. However, Ark was looking for footprints with a narrow stride. Normal NPCs and users would not leave a narrow stride in the mountains. If such a footprint remained then it was likely.....

"It is because when scouting, they want to make as little sound as possible while using 'Stealth.' The Dark Brothers are the only ones who would use 'Stealth' in order to scout. Then I'll start the chase!"

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark used amazing forensic techniques! Radun watched the process and looked at Ark with even more admiring eyes. Then a new information window appeared with lively sound effects.

-Your pet Radun has gained a new expertise from its Master.

The pet's understanding and application of various skills is poor. So it will not raise the skill through repeated uses unlike a user. In order to raise the skill proficiency of your pet the Master must understand the skill and then pass it onto the pet, stimulating their growth. Ark's understanding of Stalking has reached the conditions needed to raise Radun's stalking to a higher rating.

However, the proper training needs sincere affection to accomplish. In order to raise the skill levels of your pets, you need to pay a certain number of affection points.

<Affection needed to raise Radun's Stalking skill to an intermediate level: 50>

Would you like to raise Radun's Stalking to intermediate?

"Eh? What is this?"

Ark read the information window with shocked eyes.

"My understanding is necessary to raise my pet's skill levels?"

In fact, in the meantime Ark had been having some doubts about the skills of his pets. Each of his pets had two types of skills. For example, the first type is the fixed skill such as 'Radun transform.' This skill was a special skill that was learnt after Ark fulfilled specific requirements. It was finished and it was impossible to have any further types of growth. And the second type was general skills. Radun's Stalking, Razak's Shield Stroke and Dedric's Taunt were all skills that could raise its proficiency. In the pet skill's information window, they showed up as beginner which meant they had growth potential. But no matter how hard he looked, the skill proficiency did not increase.

'It's definitely strange. Those skills are still beginner but they should've increased to intermediate a long time ago. I can't even see how much the degree of skilfulness is rising. Is some other condition necessary?'

Ark couldn't understand that part. Now that question had been answered after seeing the information window. His pets didn't have the ability to think for themselves which was required in order to raise the skills. Without a proper education, naturally they wouldn't learn anything about their skills. Love and patience was required for education. That's why Affection was necessary in order to educate his pets!

"So this is how to use Affection!"

Ark's eyes brightened. Among his stats, Knowledge of Ancient Relics played an important role in identifying information about ancient languages and artefacts. Flexibility helped with evasion and alleviating fall damage, Art of Communication persuaded NPCs while Resilience reduced the damage from blunt objects. However, he hadn't been able to figure out the role of Affection. He vaguely guessed that it applied to his relationships with his pets. But looking back, wouldn't that already be used by the 'Loyalty' stat? Furthermore, his Affection stat was high but Dedric still had a rebellious quality. In the end, affection did not affect his relationship with his pets. So Ark thought Affection just had a symbolic meaning.

'But Affection is like bonus skills points for my summons!'

Yes, if the pets didn't have enough affection for their Master then there was no reason for them to learn the skills. Raising the skills was meant to help their Master. In other words, they raised it in return for their Master's affection. Therefore the information window explained that Affection was necessary to raise the skills.

'Ha, there are no useless stats in New World.'

"Stat information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +400		
Fame	9,125 (+500)	Level	284
Profession	Dark Walker		
Title	Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer		
Health	4,460 (+150)	Mana	4,450
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	563 (+28)
Agility	723 (+55)	Stamina	843 (+20)
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	862
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	115
Art of Communication	46	Affection	167 (+10)

Resilienc	320		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	

‘Affection 167.....damn, if I had known about the effects of Affection.....then Razak’s and Dedric’s skills would already be intermediate.’

It was unfortunate but luckily he knew it now.

“Okay, Radun’s Stalking. Rating up!”

He used 50 points of Affection in order to raise Radun’s knowledge of the skill. After seeing its Masters serious attitude, Radun was dedicated to learning.

-The ‘Stalking’ skill has risen to intermediate.

Stalking (Intermediate, Racial special skill): Radun has mastered the new application for the skill and will be able to take advantage of the colours. The search range and duration of use has been extended. After following its Master’s keen sense of observation, Radun will be able to grasp simple information after observing the target footprint.

<The search range has been extended to 300 metres. The search time available has increased to 1 hour and 30 minutes. If the rating rises then the search range and time will be extended. Mana consumption: 50>

Additional Intermediate Effect: Sharp Reasoning.

If this skill succeeds then simple information about the target will be grasped.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

After the rating increased, Radun examined the footprints will more intelligent (?) eyes. The footprints were dyed in colour and were now easy to distinguish. The footprint Ark looked at was black. The information window divided the colours of the footprints.

-You have searched for information about the target tracks.

<Classification: Thief profession, Alignment: Normal user, Travelling time: 48 minutes ago>

‘Thief? If I followed those footprints then I would’ve gone to the wrong place!’

Ark had almost followed the footprints of a thief. Perhaps he used 'Stealth' to hunt which is why that type of footprint formed. Naturally it wasn't the target Ark was looking for. Ark could now grasp the footprints more easily thanks to Radun and searched the forest again.

-You have searched for information about the target tracks.

<Classification: Assassin profession, Alignment: Chaotic NPC, Travelling time: 26 minutes ago>

"This is it! Radun, track this footprint!"

Radun turned around at Ark's command and travelled through the dark forest. In the evening light, the red footprints were clearly visible thanks to Radun. He followed the footprints and arrived at some rocks.

"Isn't this quite far away from the caves they were previously using? Anyway, the footprints have disappeared so there must be a secret passage leading to Salrin's Towers.

Ark carefully looked over the rocks. Eventually he put his hand in a crevice and was able to grasp a handle shaped object.

'I've found it, this device clearly opens the door!'

Cheng kang-!

Suddenly a sharp dagger passed next to his ears and produced sparks on the rocks. Ark flinched and when he turned around, some branches were shaking. The hazy shape moving looked like a 1900's star craft vehicle moving in stealth mode. Then a mocking voice seemed to ring out through the whole forest.

"Go back. This is not a place where anyone can enter."

It was a veiled threat on his life! But Ark just smiled and stepped forward.

"I'm Ark. I came because I have some business."

".....Ark?"

He heard the awestruck voice before there was a sudden moment of silence. Then the branches above him shook and a masked man dropped down. He looked at Ark for a while before running up and shaking his hand.

"It really is Ark-nim. How long has it been?"

".....?"

"It's me. I was number 358....."

The masked man laughed after Ark stared at him with confusion. Now Ark could recall where he heard the voice of the masked man. It was the Dark Brothers assassin Ark and the rehabilitation members had rescued when he was attacked by rebels. After Ark confirmed it, number 359 stuck his chest out firmly and spoke in proudly.

"Hey, everybody came out and greet him. This is the Truthseeker I mentioned, Ark-nim!"

After his words, 10 other assassins appeared in the forest. In fact, Ark had been concerned after he found the passage to Salrin's Towers was blocked off. However there seemed to be no need to worry based on the assassin's attitude. After checking Ark's status, the assassins were still friendly to him as shown when they kneeled down.

"We didn't know you were coming. Please forgive our rudeness."

After his name was revealed, the assassins treated him with a lot of respect. Meanwhile, number 358 manipulated the handle to open the passage and guided Ark in.

"Are they.....?"

Ark asked after seeing the assassins close the passage from the outside. Their standard looked higher than the previous assassins. Number 358 took out a torch and then answered.

"Ah, Ark-nim wouldn't have seen them. They are the members under my direct control."

"Direct control?"

"Previously I told you I was called number 358 right? Look at this. I'm now number 206. After being promoted, I was given control over my own unit. It's all thanks to Ark-nim."

358.....no, number 206 pointed to a number written on his forehead. Probably the number stamped on the Dark Brothers was a sign indicated their name and job title. The lower the number meant a higher position. When number 206 fought while

Salrin's Towers was ran over by rebels, he helped Ark prevent the rebellion and was promoted.

"Congratulations."

"No, compared to Ark-nim there is still a long way to go."

Number 206 blushed and scratched his head. The assassin was surprisingly innocent.

"But it took a while to find you. Why did you close the previous passage?"

"Huh? Didn't you get the message?"

"What message?"

Ark asked with confusion and number 206 tilted his head to the side before replying.

"We closed the previous passage right after Ark-nim left. I thought that Leader-nim would definitely contact you.....maybe he forgot because he's too busy these days."

'What the? That Shambala.....'

Ark became sullen at number 206's words. Of course Ark didn't receive a message from Shambala. It wasn't that Shambala was too busy to get in touch, but that he probably did it intentionally. It was impossible to increase his intimacy with a NPC if Ark was there. Perhaps he was anxious Ark would increase his intimacy with Isabel when he had to leave Salrin's Towers for a while.

'That brat, don't you trust you friend?'

But honestly Ark had no right to complain. In fact, his purpose in visiting Shambala and Isabel was to coax the Dark Brothers into a war. After he left here, Ark never bothered to contact Shambala either. He would be scrutinized too closely if Shambala accompanied him. Ark had been treated like a human for the first time by Shambala.

"By the way, you really are a descendant of the Truthseeker. We worked for a long time to hide that secret passage.....if there were more people like Ark-nim in the world then we would go out of business."

Number 206 murmured as he opened another hidden door in the cave. The security was so much stricter than before that Ark asked in a doubtful voice.

"Why did you need to close the previous passage?"

"The surrounding area has become too noisy these days."

Number 206 sighed and explained. The problem was Alan. Although Alan and Nabein's revolt was suppressed thanks to Ark, Alan firmly grasped the location of Salrin's Towers. Furthermore, Alan now held a grudge towards the Dark Brothers. The Dark Brothers couldn't rule out the possibility that Alan had leaked their location to some government.

"If you look at the history, there have been a few nobles in the Schudenberg Kingdom who have been assassinated by the Dark Brothers. If they know the location of Salrin's Towers then it will be a problem. In addition, the war between the Three Kingdoms has ended so there are a large number of soldiers sweeping the surrounding area for thieves."

"Ah, that's right."

Ark nodded and number 206 continued.

"Recently a lot of foreigners have also travelled in this area."

That's the nature of online games. Over time, there were bound to be a lot more high level users. New World had already been commercialized for 1 year, so most users would've already left the beginner regions like Jackson and were now concentrated in Selebrid.

"Then if the existing location is closed, how will you receive requests?"

Ark tilted his head to one side and asked. In New World, NPCs also had to eat to live. In other words, an assassin received assassination requests in order to earn money. But wouldn't shutting down the existing meeting place interfere with the business? Wouldn't they have to scatter hidden directions to another location? Of course, whether an assassin ate or not had nothing to do with Ark. So he just asked the question without thinking but it was a surprisingly serious concern. Number 206 replied in a careful tone which wavered for a moment.

"The requests.....aren't accepted anymore."

"An assassination organization isn't receiving assassination requests?"

"As you already know, the Dark Brothers organization is a descendant of an eastern race that lost its home and wandered around. Only a few of our ancestors survived by the time they reached this continent. That was when assassination became the Dark Brothers' fate."

“Yes, I’ve heard that story before.”

“But now our home isn’t lost anymore, it is this continent. Without anyplace to return to or any moral obligations, we’ve taken root in this continent. But if we stick to assassinations, after hundreds of years only the foreigners will be left.”

That’s why Isabel an elder of the Dark Brothers had been seeking an alternative method for a long time. And the catalyst for this was the appearance of the Deliverer Shambala. Isabel decided to place the fate of the Dark Brothers into Shambala’s hands. Shambala was looking for a way to end the dark history of the Dark Brothers in order to lead it into the sun. In order to do that, he judged that the bloody nature of the Dark Brothers should be erased.

“So now the Dark Brothers won’t take assassinations anymore?”

“But the elders are stubborn.....”

Number 206 let out a sigh.

“There’s a problem.”

“Yes, that’s why Leader-nim decided to stop what he was doing and return to the tower.”

“So Shambala is in Salrin’s Towers right now?”

Ark’s forehead wrinkled. Ark had deliberately not contacted Shambala before he came here. Of course, Shambala’s help was necessary when considering Ark’s purpose. But his problem was that Shambala was extremely picky. In addition, he would clearly be able to see through Ark’s proposal. So he had wanted to recruit the innocent Isabel while Shambala was away. If Isabel was convinced that Shambala would have no choice but to go along with Ark. But now Shambala had already returned to Salrin’s Towers.....

‘Damn, I know that Shambala’s personality and he probably won’t be willing to cooperate.....’

Ark was worried until he noticed something in number 206’s words.

He didn’t know everything, but the current state of the Dark Brothers was clearly complicated. The art of diplomacy was to catch your opponent’s weakness. There might be a chance for Ark to persuade them.

"I don't know everything but it sounds like some problems have occurred. I never thought something bad would happen to the Dark Brothers so soon after I left. I might be able to help you so could you elaborate on the matter?"

Ark spoke gently and the voice rattled on.

Act 2: Netherworld GO, GO, GO!

Rattle, rattle.

"Come on quickly."

"What do you want? Well, it's not a big deal so just roughly pick something."

The 3 merchants yawned and muttered when the bell rang. Their gaming life had become quite different since they've met Ark and thanks to their older brother becoming chaotic, the three little pig siblings were now salesmen at Ark's Comprehensive Store for a low wage. Although they were semi-compelled to take the job, the three pigs didn't hate it that much. In fact, the three little pig brothers were doing quite well thanks to the game system. This was because.....merchants raised their skills and levels through various transactions. If they sold a lot of things at once then their growth would naturally be faster.

When their level increased, they could buy items for a cheap price and then sell it for a more expensive price. The three pig brothers began by Buksil purchasing and selling rare goods. Therefore Buksil managed to raise his level faster than other merchants, which led to him buying items for a cheaper price and subsequently raising Sapjil and Ulmeok's levels. Even if they were incompetent, they were able to become better merchants using this shortcut. But Buksil had accompanied Ark so the two of them couldn't do that sort of work anymore. After they died, it was common for them to lose money and experience in transactions. Thus they were grateful when Ark approached with the offer of a job.

'At least we won't lose any experience working here. We also receive a salary. Yes, it's not that bad to be a salesman here until hyung-nim accomplishes his historical feat. We can't work in the meantime so this shop is good.'

That was the three little pig brothers' intentions. They had been a little uneasy about Ark's Comprehensive Store at first but now it was fully settled. Its revenue was around 1~2 times more than the other stores in Lancel village. Thanks to that, the

three pigs were so busy that they barely had time to eat. However, the three pigs exercised patience and waited for a chance.

‘That Ark is not a merchant. He prepared the store but he won’t always be here.’

‘He will end up going somewhere else in the world! We can just waste time during business hours!’

‘It will be a win-win situation when that Ark leaves.’

Therefore they snorted when Roco was appointed as store manager.

‘Bah, we have to listen to a girl’s orders?’

‘Huhuhu, we’ll make her cry when Ark disappeared.’

‘You’re mistaken if you think we’re innocent little pigs.’

The three pig brothers smiled sneakily and thought brutal thoughts. Roco definitely had experience from her part-time job at the mart. She was proficient at stock and cash counting as well as dealing with customers. However, she was still just a girl and would have insufficient force compared to Ark. So the three pig brothers thought up devious schemes while listening to Ark. They immediately revealed their true colours when Ark left the store. They were as heinous as planned! They didn’t do inventory or cleaning, ate during rush hours and left the customers waiting.

“Huhuhu, you see? We can do this too.”

“Hyung-nim, I’m a little shaky doing bad things like this.”

“It’s okay. Just think about hitting Ark. In addition, we should’ve got a salary for 12 hours of doing nothing which is 60 gold a month.” But we didn’t even get our shares!”

In fact, thinking about it that wasn’t their actual salary. A month in New World was 10 days in reality, so their monthly income in reality would be 180 gold. That was quite high for a part time job in the game. But that was Ark’s trap. Ark previously seized a contract where the three pig brothers would provide him with 50 gold each month. However, the current balance of the three pigs had reached rock bottom thanks to the failed transactions so the payments had been put off. Thanks to the salary, Sapjil and Ulmeok could now pay Ark the support money. Therefore those two only got a monthly salary of 10 gold. With the money for food and boarding deducted, it was actually only 1 gold. It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that it was exploitation.

“Huk, I’ve suddenly become sad.”

“Don’t cry, don’t falter. Anyway, we’re going to make Ark drink water.”

Buksil, Sapjil and Ulmeok became more inspired and acted even worse. They pretended in front of Roco but once Roco left they would greet visitors with annoyed expressions. The sales which had gone up like crazy suddenly dropped after a few days.

“How much for this item? I don’t know.”

The three pigs murmured without even looking at their guests. Whenever they replied this way, the visitors would just look around and then leave. However, the reactions of the guests was different this time.

“.....I definitely heard that.”

“Maybe they need a decent education?”

The guests gossiped between them before 1 person suddenly approached the counter. He was a huge man with wide shoulders and bright eyes. He glanced at Sapjil and Ulmeok playing cards before suddenly hitting the counter and yelling.

“Attention!”

“Huk, why, why did you do that?”

“Why? Aha, that’s a good question.”

The man laughed before grabbing Buksil’s collar and lifting him up.

“I feel like beating up an unfriendly salesman whenever I see one.”

“Huh? What are you.....?”

“Noisy!”

Pepepek, snap, crunch, jjeok!

The effect of various forms of violence endured inside the store. The three pigs lost their spirits as they suddenly became punching bags. Of course, a user didn’t feel any pain when hit inside the game. But that didn’t mean they felt nothing. There was a jolt of static electricity every time they were hit. It wasn’t to the extent that they felt pain but they still suffered. In addition, a critical hit caused 3~4 times the shock so it really felt like they were dying.

"Huk, robbery!"

"G-guards, help us. These people are trying to kill us!"

The three pigs shouted as they barely managed to open the door. A few guards were patrolling so some of them turned their heads when they heard the SOS.

"T-that's it. You unscrupulous people, you guys are now....."

"These brats are really noisy."

However, instead of running away the group of men just stepped on them harder. What was going on? Why weren't they scared even though the guards were notified? They were even more amazed at the guards' absurd reaction.

"Ah, Captain. When did you come?"

"Oh, it's you guys?" I arrived a short time ago."

"Why are you beating up those pigs?"

"It's no big deal. Just doing some work."

"I understand. If you need any help then just call us."

The guards saluted before going away. What was with this absurd situation? They were good salesmen in the village so why wasn't the guards helping them? In addition, didn't they call for help? Yet the guards just left even after seeing the them being beaten up? It wasn't just the guards. The nearby residents also witnessed such atrocities yet they didn't care. Even the Meow clan elder Hassan waved to the leader of the group before disappearing after a leisurely chat.

'What the? What on earth is going on?'

'Are we invisible to the residents?'

The three little pig brothers couldn't understand their current situation. They were being beaten up for no reason yet no one came to save them. Why was this unfair thing happening to them? The three pigs shed tears while screaming with pain and chagrin.....

"Why are you doing this?"

"Huk, please stop hitting us. We're good pigs!"

They were almost half crazy by the time they heard the voice of salvation.

“Omo? This is.....?”

Roco had gone to the training camp to receive the ingredients from the Baran clan and had finally returned. The three pig brothers caught the hem of Roco’s skirt.

“S-store manager!”

“Save us. We didn’t do anything wrong but those people are trying to kill us!”

The three pig brothers shouted as they pointed towards the group of men. The three pig brothers always treated Roco badly when Ark wasn’t present. But in this situation they had no choice but to ask for her help. Roco had a regretful expression as she wiped off the three pigs’ nosebleeds and protested towards the group.....

“Oppas, what is this? I told you not to hit their face so why did you hit their faces?”

“Uh, did you? I’m sorry. I unconsciously did it.”

“How can they engage in business when their faces are like this?”

Roco smiled as she meticulously polished the faces of the three pigs before getting up.

“Okay, it’s done now. Please continue.”

...What was she saying?

Buksil wore a stupid expression as he looked between Roco and the group. Which reminded him.....he had seen those guys before. They were the 11 people previously seen in Selebrid with Ark! That’s right, it was JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members. He finally remembered. Then Buksil saw it. There was a light smile on Roco’s face..... At the moment, Buksil felt like it was the climax of a terrifying horror movie.

‘Oh my god, it was this. The thing Sid mentioned.....!’

He understood the entire situation after seeing Roco’s smile. When Ark left Lancel village, Sid also returned to Silvana. At that time, Sid and Buksil were familiar with each other and Sid seemed to have guessed his plan. After Ark left, they planned to ignore Roco and make a mess of the store..... Then Sid put his hands on Buksil’s shoulders and said in a serious voice.

"Whatever you're thinking now, it is better to stop. You don't know how scary Roco-nim is. Do you think Ark-nim won't see what you're doing?"

However, Buksil forgot about it as soon as Sid left. After Ark left, it was just Roco and the three pig brothers remaining. Roco was just holding the store until Ark returned. So the three pig brothers judged Roco to be too nice and did their own things. But he should've listened to his senior's words.

'Then Roco incited all of this.....devil, that woman is the devil!'

Buksil felt like he saw black wings flapping behind Roco. The Devil's girlfriend was also a devil. He realized this simple fact too late. After the three pig brothers were turned into mincemeat, Roco guided JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group to the 2nd floor. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members surveyed the store.

"Yah, I heard about it but that Ark really did set up a store."

"At any rate, when did that Ark managed to prepare this?"

"Isn't there quite a lot of items?"

"By the way.....you're managing this store for the moment?"

"Yes, the situation is like this."

Roco smiled and put on a mock-concerned expression.

"But didn't oppas act too severely just then?"

The sound of groaning pigs could be heard downstairs. In fact, Roco had suffered quite a lot because of the three pig brothers. She had to work hard to earn gold in order to build that house on the blue meadow.....but the situation turned bad as soon as Ark left. Thankfully the sales hadn't decreased that much after Ark left. Roco also had experience with this thanks to her part time job. Often the men working at the convenience store would pick on Roco after the boss left. But that wasn't all. Sometimes they would even start openly talking dirty. Of course, the three brothers didn't take it that far but they were similar in that they looked down on women.

'It would be resolved in an instant if I told Ark oppa.....'

But she didn't want to act weak when Ark trusted her with the store manager position. That's when she remembered that the rehabilitation members were coming to Lancel after they left Jackson. She explained it to JusticeMan who thought up this

plan. While the three pigs were being beaten up by JusticeMan, Roco would appear and indirectly plant fear into them.

"You don't have to worry. Just do it so that those guys will notice."

"That's right, if they see signs that you're worried then they'll start acting up again."

"Daring to bother Roco and smashing Ark's shop, they must be insane."

"We'll take care of it."

"We're professionals at disciplining guys like this."

"Instead Roco, you finally did it!"

"Huh?"

"Huhuhu, aren't you looking after Ark's livelihood?"

JusticeMan smirked and muttered.

"If a man trusts his livelihood to you then it's already over."

"Have strength Roco. Now there's only one step left. Oppa will cheer for you."

"Aye, it's not like that. By the way oppas....."

Roco got up with a sulky face. She placed several different types of herbal medicines on a tray and placed it on the table.

"These are the goods in the store. Take a look at the flavour."

Roco truly had a friendly personality.

"Oh, as expected of our cutie. We only have you."

"Eat a lot. You probably didn't eat properly while in the underground labyrinth of Cairo."

"U-underground labyrinth!"

The rehabilitation members' hands there were reaching for the food paused at Roco's words. And their faces became gloomy as they looked at each other.

"That's right, we couldn't eat properly."

"It's was three months. Never seeing sunlight, stomach starving while hunting skeletons and slimes for three months..... Meanwhile we....."

"When compared to the underground labyrinth, a jail cell is like heaven. At least you get to see the sun."

"Ugh, let's stop. I'm going to be sick if I think about it anymore."

The rehabilitation members muttered as they started sweating. Yes, the rehabilitation members really didn't want to be reminded of the underground labyrinth again. After going down into the underground labyrinth, the sewers smelt like rotting corpses. Their opponents were also skeletons and slimes. Although it was interesting at first thanks to gaining levels and items, after three months they felt like they were wondering the labyrinth in a dream.

-You haven't seen the sunlight in so long that you've gained 'Autism.'

<Your mental state will be at the lowest possible for 1 hour while your mana is continuously decreased.>

-You haven't seen the sunlight in so long that you've become 'Depressed.'

<Your motivation is gone and your attack and defense is reduced by 20%>

Anyone in those states would've given up out of tiredness. But the rehabilitation members had their own pride. Ark needed it so they shouted and endured. If the unicorn horn prices hadn't soared then they would've probably still been in the underground labyrinth suffering from depression.

"I would rather be in jail then go back to that underground labyrinth!"

The rehabilitation members all nodded and agreed with Jjak-tung's words. That atmosphere was too gloomy so Roco changed it to something else.

"T-thanks to that suffering we're able to make some Slime's Immortality Pill."

"Indeed....."

Fortunately, the rehabilitation members looked a little brighter.

"Didn't Shambala send a unicorn horn and Sid bought 4 as well? Then we've acquired 5?"

"Six."

“Six?”

“.....Ark oppa gained one more.”

Roco hesitated before explaining. Yes, before Ark left Lancel village he gained one unicorn horn from Roco’s mount, the Unicorn. While speaking with Ark, Roco summoned the Unicorn without thinking. But Ark suddenly looked at the Unicorn like it was surrounded by a golden light. He had cut off the horn six months ago and now it had grown back.

“Roco, that horn.....!”

“No.”

Roco outright refused. The unicorn horn had grown back thanks to Roco’s efforts for half a year. The horn also made the Unicorn look a lot nicer. During her spare time, Roco had read all the information on the unicorn and found it good food and basically took care of it. When Roco refused, the Unicorn snorted at Ark which made him angry. However, the Unicorn didn’t know a woman’s mentality that well.

“Roco, please. Yes? I’ll divided the earnings with you 7:3. And it’s not for me. The rehabilitation hyungs went through all that trouble yet we only obtained 5. You still won’t let? Okay, then 8:2. How about it? I’ll also watch any movie you want to watch this weekend in the evening.”

“R-really? A movie in the evening? Promise?”

Eventually, the Unicorn was abandoned for a movie and dinner.

“Now, this white horse, why don’t you have a short talk with hyung?”

Hihing? Hihihihing? Hihihihing!

Ark grinned as he grabbed the Unicorn’s neck and led it somewhere else. After a while, Ark once again cut off the unicorn horn. After exchanging it with the rehabilitation members’ funds for 20%, Ark was able to obtain 200 gold.

‘I’m sorry. But Oppa and I haven’t gone on a date for 3 weeks.’

A woman in love would often do cruel things with no hesitation. Of course, Roco couldn’t explain everything to the rehabilitation members so she summarized it quickly.

“I’ll temporarily give it to oppa for 500 gold. We’ll decide if its insufficient later.”

"Well done."

JusticeMan nodded as he packed the unicorn horn.

"But what is Ark doing that he left you in charge of the store?"

"Ah, that's right. Ajusshi and oppas wouldn't have heard yet."

"Heard what?"

"In fact"

Roco explained what Ark had told her. Currently the Hermes Alliance had joined up with the Nakujuk to conquer the Netherworld. Ark had gone to the Dark Brothers to ask for help preventing it. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation group's foreheads wrinkled at the description.

"Those Hermes bastards...."

"They went all the way to the Netherworld to pick on Ark?"

"And they also raided the village and enslaved the Baran?"

"Hyung-nim, how can we leave these actions alone?"

"Yes, we can't keep watching while the Hermes Alliance acts like this."

"And I absolutely don't want to go back underground."

JusticeMan nodded at the end of their words.

"Of course. It would be didn't if I didn't know, but I can't do nothing now that I do know. By the way, shouldn't Ark have consulted us first?"

Then Roco grinned and replied.

"That's why Ark oppa spoke to me before leaving. Oppa asked me to explain the situation in the Netherworld to you when you arrived. Of course he thought you would help."

"Oh, is that right?"

"Probably. Huhuhu, Ark hadn't forgotten us."

"This war.....my blood is starting to boil."

"It's a good opportunity to try out our new professions."

Roco's eyes widened at the end of JusticeMan's words.

"Change profession? Did you change your profession in Jackson?"

"Huhuhu, I did. I finally found the perfect job for us."

JusticeMan struck his chest and laughed.

Then Roco noticed something different about JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members.

"Eh? Oppa, attached to your chest.....medal? It's a medal?"

"Now you noticed."

JusticeMan rubbed the shining medal on his chest proudly. Then he explained how he changed professions in Jackson.

Until recently, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members had no profession. Of course they hadn't intended it that way. When they arrived at Jackson which was the first place they could switch professions, the Event Quest was triggered and there was no time. Then after the event quest, he received an offer from Lord Jackson which made him reconsider changing professions. He proposed that if they built up their reputations in the Evil Silrion, when they came back they would be an autonomous force. Therefore JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members headed to Selebrid with hopes of success. But they tangled with the bandit group and got saddled with an unprecedented number level 200 freeloader thieves. That was why JusticeMan and his group went to pay Lord Jackson a visit. It had been over one year since the Lord Jackson made his proposal to them. Yet they never even stepped past the threshold of the Evil Silrion so they were extremely sorry towards Lord Jackson. So he deliberately went in order to give an explanation.

".....It is an unpleasant thing."

The young Lord Jackson spoke in a heavy voice. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members didn't give any excuses and just bowed their heads silently.

"We're really sorry."

"You should be sorry. Do you think I'm so narrow-minded that I would blame you for that? In addition, wouldn't Jackson lose some great talents if I blamed you?"

“Huh? What are you.....?”

JusticeMan was puzzled by the end of the Lord’s words. Then the watching Cross interrupted with a smile.

“Teacher, the Lord already knows the circumstances so you don’t have to explain.”

“The thieves you rehabilitated live in Lancel village which is right near Jackson. And Cross mentioned that you helped Ark stop the disturbing plot of Alan and the Asyeosu church. Yet you thought I would be unaware of your deeds?”

The Lord gave an outrageous laugh. Then he tapped JusticeMan’s shoulders lightly and spoke again.

“I am very happy yet regretful as well. I am glad because you brought true justice to the kingdom of Schudenberg. But it is regretful because I can’t keep such wonderful people underneath my command. Sir Cross, bring them to me.”

When the Lord beckoned, Cross handed something over to him. They were 11 medals with a blue gem inlaid in them.

“Although you don’t realise it yet, your fame and skills have already passed the point of an autonomous force. I went through a long process of appeal with His Majesty for these. You have already obtained the necessary honour and fame, so I wanted a guaranteed position for you. And His Majesty sent me the answer a few days ago. These are the Protector medals.”

With the Lord put the medal on JusticeMan, an information window appeared.

Protector Medal (Special, Locked)

Item type: 1st rank medal

User restriction: Propensity for Unemployment 100, Fame 6,000 in the Schudenberg Kingdom.

This Medal of Honour is awarded to a person with special achievements recognized by the King. The person with this medal will obtain the title of ‘Guardian.’ A Guardian is someone who is the true definition of justice. In the past centuries, it was an honourable title given to the militia who fought to protect the borders in the Dark Century.

Although the meaning has faded, people given the title of Guardian still receive respect. Those who own the medal with receive special treatment in the all

government offices depending on their level of fame. In addition, if the nobility gathers a militia then they will give priority command to holders of the medal.

<Option: Holders of the medal will gain an additional 20% when acquiring fame>

JusticeMan read the information window with a puzzled expression. Then there was a ringing sound and a new information window appeared.

-You have acquired information to switch professions.

If you have not selected a profession when you have acquired a 3rd rank or more medal, you will be given the opportunity to select a new profession depending on the rank of the medal. JusticeMan has received a 1st rank medal so you can change your occupation to 'Guardian= General.'

JusticeMan has no current profession so there will be no penalty if you change professions.

If you change professions, you will have the opportunity to learn a variety of skills associated with 'Guardian=General.' However, 'Guardian=General' belongs to a special category of professions which can't be cancelled once they have been selected.

Would you like to change your profession?

"C-change profession?"

The rehabilitation members also murmured after receiving their medals. Just like JusticeMan, each of the rehabilitation members had their information updated when they wore the medals. When they read the description of 'Guardian' it sounded similar to a knight profession. However, it wasn't just a knight wielding a sword. Each of them had a specific type of job depending on their skill set. It was similar to a branch of service in the army. Just receiving the medal didn't make it possible to change to Guardian. The necessary conditions were 100 propensity for employment and 6,000 fame. It was a condition that users who normally changed professions between level 15~20 couldn't even imagine. In addition, there was a minimal strength, stamina and agility value set by the limitations of the professions. Before changing into a Guardian, they needed to exceed at least 100 points in each stat! Who on earth would wait to change professions until then? However, it wasn't a problem for JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members since they were over level 200.

"I am convinced that you are suited for these medals."

The Lord said with a warm smile. He was advising them to change to the professions available thanks to the medals. Those words convinced JusticeMan. Here was a good person who acknowledged them. And he gave a proper reward for that acknowledgement. They had halfway given up on reality and just lived in the game. JusticeMan wouldn't refuse the job even if it was ridiculously bad.

"I'll change my profession!"

"Pay your respects to the new Guardian!"

"Wah ah ah!"

The soldiers lined up on both sides and cheered at the Lord's command. At the same time, the profession information window floated in front of JusticeMan.

Guardian = General

Long ago, there was a famous general who led the militia during the Dark Century.

Since you've changed your profession to General using the Medal of Honour, you can't officially influence the Kingdom's soldiers. However, the soldiers will have a very favourable impression of you and will offer you a variety of amenities. In addition, you can learn more professional skills to govern an army. After changing to 'Guardian', there will be an added bonus and you can use a special strategy.

<Added Bonus: Health +200, Mana +200, Strength +50, Stamina +50, Agility +20, Wisdom +20, Intelligence +20 and Luck +10.

Normally only the warrior profession would receive an added bonus. However, the guardian's bonus for changing jobs was twice as high. The stat bonus was like increasing his level 16 times! There were also 7 different commander skills added. Since he already had skills like 'Strategy' and 'Command', the overlapping effect caused the skill proficiency to increase. The other rehabilitation members also selected according to their fame and skill orientation.

Guardian = Assaulter

The assaulter of the militia who fought in the Dark Century. Using powerful strength and stamina, the assaulter was able to cut down knights of the Dark Legion.

You can use every type of weapons except for the magic types and you can wear plate armour and shields.

Sword Mastery and defense are the basics of a 'Guardian= Assaulter.'

In addition, depending on your level there is a chance to learn a special assault skill or impregnable defense wall.

<Added Bonus: Strength +60, Stamina +60, Agility +15, Wisdom +15, Intelligence +5 and Luck +5>

Guardian = Scout

A scout who was in the militia in the Dark Century.

Using their exception agility, the Scout disturbed the Army of Darkness. Their main equipment are daggers, bows and leather armour.

The 'Guardian=Scout' has the basic skills of fencing, archery and stealth. In addition, depending on your level there is a chance to learn special skills related to intuition, concealing and obsuration.

<Added Bonus: Strength +30, Stamina +30, Agility +60, Wisdom +20, Intelligence +5 and Luck +15>

Guardian = Engineer

An engineer who helped out the militia in the Dark Century.

An all-round handyman who deals with a variety of equipment in order to assist the militia. Their main equipment is a spear, tools and chain armour.

The 'Guardian=Engineer' uses the basic skills of weapon construction of architecture. In addition, depending on the level you can learn a variety of skills involving siege weapons, installing traps and supplies.

<Added Bonus: Strength +20, Stamina +20, Agility +20, Wisdom +40, Intelligence +40 and Luck +20>

Guardian = Strategist

A strategist who was in the militia in the Dark Century.

A strategists assists the General in improving the success rate of various strategies. Their main equipment is a long sword, a flag and fighting spirit.

The 'Guardian=Strategist' has the basic skills of Sword Mastery and evasion. In addition, depending on your level you can learn special skills such as deceit,

geography and scheming.

<Added Bonus: Strength +10, Stamina +10, Agility +10, Wisdom +50, Intelligence +50 and Luck +30>

The 10 rehabilitation members finished changing their professions into the respective Guardian type. Every profession had Guardian attached as a title so the Guardian Unit was completed with the General as their commander.

"Huhuhu, we're no longer the rehabilitation group. Guardian has a nice ring to it."

"We should test out the newly learned skills."

"The Netherworld war.....we'll get to have a proper fight."

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members already had their blood boiling at the idea. Then JusticeMan suddenly spoke with confusion.

"But don't we have to wait for Ark before going to the Netherworld?"

"No. Oppa left a guide for us."

"Guide?"

"Hey, Buksil oppa!"

While JusticeMan and Roco were talking, the three pig brothers had finished their mental training downstairs. Buksil immediately jump up and obeyed when Roco called.

"Yes, you called Store Manager!"

"Do you remember Ark oppa's words? These people are the ones you will be guiding to the Netherworld."

"Thanks you in advance. I am called Buksil. Please let me serve you."

Buksil dragged his body like it was gravy as he winced. It was the result of the mental training. Anyway, a user had to designate the target when using Dimensional Movement Powder. The rehabilitation members had never been to the Netherworld so they couldn't use the powder. That was why Ark left Buksil in the

store. Thanks to Buksil his younger brothers briefly showed signs of revolt, with the pigs ending up like dogs.....

“Okay, now let’s go!”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members shouted after the gate was created. Then Roco ran up to them and said something surprising.

“You’re going? Oppa, I have to calculate it before you go.”

“Huh? Calculate what? You already gave us the price for the unicorn horn. We decided that any new ones would be 500 gold.”

JusticeMan asked with a perplexed expression while Roco became frustrated.

“Please stop it. I have to collect the money for the tonics and food I gave you before.”

“Eh? Y-you want money for that?”

“What are you talking about? You ate the goods from the store so of course you have to pay.”

“B-but you have all our money.....”

A rehabilitation member muttered in a low voice, causing Roco to laugh.

“You thought I didn’t know about everyone’s emergency funds? Behave yourselves and take it out quickly. The business has become difficult thanks to Sapjil and Ulmeok so I can’t afford to feed you for free. You ate 30 days’ worth of tonics and 11 luxury dishes. Eleven cups of Herbal Tea. The total is 18 gold and 32 silver. I would be happy to receive items as payment. Ark oppa won’t let me. But he has already gone on the road. If you don’t have money then you can mortgage your armour.”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members froze at the end of Roco’s words. For a warrior on the battlefield to mortgage their armour.....wasn’t that impossible? In the end, the rehabilitation group had to quickly search through their emergency funds to pay for the food before going to the Netherworld. Ark really had chosen an amazing store manager.

“Hey friend! It’s been a while. Have you been well?”

Ark smiled as he entered the parlour. Shambala had been having a serious conversation with Isabel. His eyes seemed surprised when he first saw Ark before it became somewhat restless.

"What the? What are you doing here?"

"Yaya, give me a break to recover my breath. Miss Isabel, have you been well?"

"I'm fine but thank you for your concern."

Ark knelt like a medieval knight before lightly kissing the back of Isabel's hand. It was an awkward movement for a modern man but Isabel lived in medieval times so such gestures were natural to her. Shambala's mouth contorted as he watched through eyes as sharp as a hawk's.

"I asked you a question!"

Shambala nudged him with the hilt of a sword.

"Ugh! Why wouldn't I come? I swore friendship to the Dark Brothers."

"Since when have you sworn friendship to the Dark Brothers?"

"Of course since I helped defeat Nabein. Isn't that right Miss Isabel?"

"Yes, Ark-nim is a rare guest."

Isabel smiled beautifully and nodded. Ark laughed and threw his arm around Shambala's shoulder.

"Don't act so sour. Eh, Deliverer-nim?"

"Damn brat."

Shambala declared sharply with a voice mixed with annoyance. However, Ark stayed close to Shambala and whispered in a low voice.

"Why are you so nervous? Aren't things going well between you and Isabel noona? Did you want to consult with me?"

".....Do you want to die?"

"Gosh, you really want to hit me? Okay, I'll knock it off. Who knew you would be having so much difficulties that you would turn to violence?"

“Difficulties? Me? You’re the one making my blood pressure high.”

“Huhuhu, why are you like this?”

Ark retreated as Shambala held up a fist. Then he lowered his head politely to Isabel and began to talk.

“There actually was a special reason for my visit.”

“Please say it.”

“I wanted to confirm it first.”

Ark erased his playfulness and spoke seriously.

“I heard that the Dark Brothers is currently in a difficult situation. Is it true?”

Isabel and Shambala flinched at Ark’s question. Isabel hesitated as she looked at Shambala. Then Shambala gave a little nod and took one step forward. It was a very short scene but Ark could guess the relationship between the two based on it. Isabel postponed answering a difficult question until she looked at Shambala. It meant she trusted and relied on Shambala. And Shambala took a step forward so he would be in a position to speak for her. Ark’s keen eyes could sense the relationship between the two with that one move. So why he couldn’t understand the girls surrounding him.....was unknown. Then Shambala nodded and answered.

“It’s not to the extent that I would call it a difficulty. It is just a bit noisy.”

“You came back here because it was a bit noisy?”

“If seems like you’ve been poking around uselessly. Why don’t you tell me what you want to say?”

Ark turned around at Shambala’s annoyed voice.

“I’ll do that.”

Ark laughed and nodded his head. He had heard about the Dark Brothers’ problem from number 206 just then. It occurred while Ark had been playing in the Netherworld. During that time, the Dark Brothers went through many changes. It changed because of Shambala’s profession quest. He was to wander to continent and unite the scattered branches of the Dark Brothers. Shambala’s current quest achievement was at 60%. He had rallied more than half of the Dark Brothers’ forces. It was the first time they had rallied that many forces since Salrin the Master Assassin during the Dark Century. It seemed like a prelude to achieving Isabel’s

dream of drawing the Dark Brothers into the light. If Shambala successfully achieved 100% then that would undoubtedly be his next goals. This desire made him want to rally the Dark Brothers even quicker. But in the past people had rallied all of the Dark Brothers but it wasn't possible to achieve Salrin's goal. Then what did he have to do? Isabel was worried until Shambala gave her some advice.

"Do you remember the rehabilitation group who helped us the other day? They managed to rehabilitate thieves they subdued in the past. And now those thieves are living as ordinary people."

The ordinary thieves were living in a bright world. The rehabilitation members' achievements raised Isabel's hopes. Thus they decided to reform the Dark Brothers using the model derived from the thieves' rehabilitation. The first step was to stop the assassination missions. But Isabel overlooked one thing. The chaotic value of thieves who sometimes robbed and killed merchants was significantly different from those of the Dark Brothers who had assassinated nobility. The thieves only took 1 month to lose their chaotic status while the Dark Brothers would take a year. Furthermore, the thieves were a group of people with no professions. On the other hand, the Dark Brothers were assassins. They hadn't learned anything other than fighting. What could the Dark Brothers do if they stopped assassinations?

The thieves received help from Lancel village but that wasn't possible for the Dark Brothers. Thanks to rallying the scattered forces, their numbers had increase even more. After their income disappeared, the finances suffered and was stretched by the extra numbers. Of course, the assassination organization had a long history so they piled up a small fortune. However, there was no guarantee that the fortune would last. If their assets disappeared completely then what would Isabel do? Without any money left, wouldn't the Dark Brothers just be unemployed assassins?

"I understand Chief-nim's intention. Chief-nim is not the only one with that desire."

"But will motivation be enough?"

"Did you forget that we were forced to choose the assassin life?"

"We are a family. If we starve then we'll have to make the same choices as our ancestors and start the bloody history again."

The elders of each branch started expressing their dissatisfaction. It was to the extent that some elders insisted on returning to the independent assassin lifestyle. Thus Shambala halted his quest and returned to the tower. If this situation continued then there was no assurance that the people he rallied would stay.

Well, he was mostly worried about Isabel's predicament.....

‘Shouldn’t it be better since Shambala has finally arrived?’

Shambala played the game quite differently from Ark. Ark was the type that would flatter the NPCs if there was any benefit to him. On the other hand, Shambala was the type to rush silently towards his goal. Thanks to that character the assassins trusted him but it didn’t help in fixing this complicated situation.

‘I’m sorry Shambala and Isabel but this is a great opportunity for me!’

It was fortunate he met number 206 at the entrance. Ark had saved number 206’s life so his intimacy was at the highest possible. If he hadn’t met number 206 then he wouldn’t have known the internal details. Because of that, Ark was in the best condition to start negotiations. Ark hesitated before making a suggestion.

“The Dark Brothers’ problem, maybe there’s a way I can help?”

“Yes?”

Shambala sent him a doubtful look. But Ark just feigned ignorance and continued.

“Let me sum it up. What’s the current problem of the Dark Brothers?”

“We can’t do any other work.”

“Yes, that’s the point. You can’t work. Thus you won’t make money. In addition, stress will accumulate without anything to do. This is the biggest problem. You need to work to resolve this issue. But if you start the assassinations again then the Dark Brothers would just get further from the light.”

“.....So what’s your suggestion?”

In a conversation, he had to make sure person A, B, and C understood the situation. After pointing out the situation, he moved one step closer to his goal.....if he just threw the body then they would cut it down coldly.

“You just have to create a proper job.”

“What?”

“That’s what you wanted to say?”

“You really.....”

Isabel interrupted when Shambala started frowning.

"Wait. A proper job? Tell me more."

"Some people might not like it.....but they'll do it at Chief-nim's request. Now, I'll explain it again. I discovered another dimension on my travels. And the residents of this dimension are being threatened by a hostile tribe. They desperately need someone's help."

"You want us to help them?"

"You're very perceptive."

"How will that help us?"

Shambala cut in coldly. Ark looked at him with pity and shook his finger.

"Tsk tsks, so slow..... So you didn't understand? Shall I explain? It is another dimension. In other words, the laws of middle earth don't apply. The assassins from the Dark Brothers won't have any problems living there. No, if you help the residents against the hostile tribes then they would welcome you. The Dark Brothers could set up a new base there."

Now there was a slight change in Shambala's face. But Shambala closed his eyes and thought for a moment before sighing.

"If it is enough to threaten the residents then shouldn't the power of the enemy be quite considerable?"

"They wouldn't need the Dark Brothers help if that wasn't the case."

"Even if it would work, our forces would take quite a hit as well."

"Aren't some sacrifices necessary to accomplish your purpose in middle earth?"

"....."

Shambala was silent before opening his mouth again.

"Okay, I assume that is your purpose. But our dream is to establish ourselves in the world of light. Hiding in an unknown place would be just like hiding right now."

Good, now it was progressing in the desired direction. Ark laughed and nodded his head.

"That would be true if my purpose ended there."

“Purpose ended there?”

“If you interfere with the enemy’s attack then I can re-join the Netherworld with middle earth. Thus a new continent would appear in New World. What would happen then?”

Shambala just tilted his head with confusion, making Ark shake his head.

“Slow, you’re so slow Shambala, can’t you use your imagination to guess what will happen?”

Ark continued.

“So I’ll give some more hints. A new continent that didn’t exist until now appeared in New World. Then wouldn’t the residents of the Netherworld seem like aristocrats? What kind of behaviour would you receive?”

“You, you don’t mean.....?”

“Now you’re starting to understand.”

Ark nodded and Isabel’s burst out with surprise.

“I see, I understand what Ark-nim is saying! If the place Ark-nim called the Netherworld appeared in middle earth, it would be a new continent. If a new continent appeared then there would be two reactions. Hostility or friendliness.”

“.....Please continue.”

Ark looked at Isabel like she was awesome and nodded. Thus Isabel continued in an even more excited tone.

“But the relationship between the three kingdoms isn’t that great. After fighting in the Nagaran War for so long, they can’t afford something like that. Therefore their reaction will be friendliness. It’s difficult to believe.....if a new kingdom appeared then the balance of power in New World would change.”

“Well done. Then here’s the last question. What would happen if the Dark Brothers defeated the hostile forces and were firmly allied with the residents by the time the Netherworld appeared in middle earth? I’ll tell you beforehand. The society of the residents is less developed than ours so they won’t understand the politics of that scale.”

“Then the Dark Brothers would act as the representatives of the Netherworld and meet with the three powers for friendly talks.”

Isabel replied with a wide grin. Yes, that was the weapon of persuasion that Ark had prepared. Ark had actually sketched the contents while leaving Lancel village. But his persuasion method changed slightly after hearing number 206's words. If he hadn't know that and went to the Dark Brothers first, he would've worded it as a cry for help. Although the precondition changed, the results was the same.

'Huhuhu, I'm in a position to ask something from the Dark Brothers.'

Ark's knowledge in cheap tricks was increasing every day. However, Shambala made a slightly dissatisfied expression like expected.

"But Ark might just be telling a story."

"Shambala-nim won't believe in your friend?"

"Ah, it really is sad."

Ark sighed and made a pitiful expression at Isabel. Thanks to that, Shambala was made to look like a bad guy and he spoke in an embarrassed voice.

"W-we still don't know if there's a place called the Netherworld. We also don't know anything about the hostile forces threatening the residents."

"Our ancestors also experienced that when they first stepped foot on this continent."

"Of course. Didn't the Dark Brothers inherit the blood of the ancestors with the courage to explore the unknown world?"

"Ark, you're too noisy!"

Shambala raised his voice angrily and spoke to Isabel.

"Are you willing to give up Salrin's Towers where you were born?"

".....It won't be a problem if it's for the Dark Brothers' dream."

"That's what I mean. Can't you make your home anywhere?"

"Ark, I told you to be quiet!"

Shambala viciously glared at Ark like he was tempted to kill him. In a battle it might be different but Shambala couldn't win against Ark in an argument.

-You have reached your goal through clever words.

<Art of Communication increases by 20>

His Art of Communication only rose when he successfully persuaded an NPC! Because of the information window, it was clear that Isabel had already made up her mind.

"We have to shake off our dark history in order to be truly reborn. This is the long-cherished desire of the Dark Brothers. We have to achieve it at any cost for the next generation. Deliverer-nim, I don't want to miss this opportunity."

With the situation like this, there was no way Shambala could go against Isabel. That was why Ark had concentrated on capturing Isabel.

'Huhuhu Shambala. You still have a long way to go.'

Anyway, Ark's purpose was accomplished but it wasn't a bad thing for the Dark Brothers. No, it was an opportunity just like he said. In other words, every part was good so.....it was a win-win. Then Shambala narrowed the distance and bluntly told Ark.

"Okay, you got your way. Now tell me something. What do you want?"

'I was waiting for that question.'

Ark knew that Shambala would ask such questions. In fact, while coming here Ark only thought he would be lucky to receive help. But the situation changed. Now Ark didn't just get help, he also opened a way for the Dark Brothers to live. Meanwhile Ark would be able to complete the <Study the Mirage> and <The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree> quests.

"Well, that's right. Of course I will receive some favours if everything goes well."

Ark pretended ignorance and talked about compensation. It was impossible for Ark to go to all this trouble for no profit. He clearly had some other purpose. So Shambala's doubts disappeared after Ark talked about rewards.

"I see."

"We should be able to accommodate that much. It is for the fate of the family."

Isabel accepted Ark's request. Then she summoned a meeting and began preparations to enter the Netherworld. Meanwhile Ark also checked his equipment and hurried to make preparations to return to the Netherworld.

“Summon Demon, Dedric and Razak!”

“Ah, damn.....my precious vacation has finished.”

Dedric’s complaints increased as soon as he was summoned. He hadn’t seen Ark for a while so he became undisciplined again. But Ark just stroked Dedric’s head and spoke in a gentle voice.

“Don’t be annoyed. I’ll give you another great holiday when this finishes.”

Then Dedric’s jaw dropped as he stared with bemusement.

“Huk, w-what is going on? Master, did you eat something bad?”

‘This brat.....’

Ark became angry but held it in. It was thanks to the Affection stat that Ark endured it. He knew how to utilize Affection now so it was important to refrain from any violence to raise it even more. If it was for that goal, Ark could see his pet’s rebellion as humorous.

“Now let’s create the circle!”

Ark created a very large magic circle on top of Salrin’s Towers with the help of his summons. The scale of the expedition was quite large since the Dark Brothers’ fate was tied to the Netherworld. There were 400 of the Chief’s elite troops. They also gathered 800 of the Dark Brothers finest assassins. Isabel had wanted to be the commander but conceded thanks to Shambala’s earnest persuasions. Instead, Isabel decided to stay at the tower to provide rear support while the rest of the Dark Brothers prepared to leave for the Netherworld.

“A long time ago our ancestors stepped on this continent to find a new hope and now it is our turn to take up the challenge. The place we’re going isn’t a comfortable land. A lot of pain and sacrifice will follow. But we have to go. For the sake of our future.

For the glory of the Dark Brothers!”

Isabel’s sword thrust into the sky while hundreds of other swords following. The war where the Dark Brothers’ fate was intertwined with the Netherworld had begun.

Act 3: Show me the money!

“Have you been well in the meantime?”

After coming unharmed to the Netherworld, Ark and the Dark Brothers met up with Buksil and the rehabilitation members in Hagel Forest. Although he acted grumpy towards Ark, Shambala nodded and greeted the rehabilitation members politely. JusticeMan smiled and nodded.

“Oh Shambala, it’s been a while. Isn’t this the first time we’ve seen each other since Salrin’s Towers?”

Yes, I’m relieved to see hyung-nim.”

Ark stared at Shambala while muttering.

“What does that mean? You weren’t relieved to see me?”

“When are you done anything to make me trust you?”

Shambala declared sharply while looking scornful. Ugh, why was he acting like this? Ark could talk about how dependable he was for 4 days and 3 nights but there was no time. Jewel and the Nakujuk were still carrying out their plan to take over the Netherworld. They needed to join the Baran as soon as possible to discuss countermeasures.

“Shambala, we’ll have a serious talk later.”

Ark led the troops across the Netherworld.

‘That is the meeting place of the Baran?’

When they arrived at the Golgi Mountains, they saw the hastily set up tents and the armed Baran.

“W-what the? Who are you?”

Ark had been leading the troops but he was suddenly blocked by a group of Baran. They saw the chaotic assassins and judged them to be enemies. Even if they weren’t chaotic, the Baran was being invaded so they were naturally wary of strangers. In the meantime, someone rushed out and hurriedly waved. It was Lariette who had gone with Beseutyu to the Golgi Mountains first.

“They’re not enemies! It’s people who have come to help the Baran!”

“Came to help us?”

"Yes, this is Ark-nim who Beseutyu-nim spoke about."

The Baran quickly peeked at Ark after Lariette's explanation. Then Lariette turned to Ark and smiled.

"I've been waiting since I received your message."

Ark had called Lariette before coming to the Netherworld. So Ark already grasped most of the situation. Lariette and Beseutyu lit the 'Pledge Beacon', gathering the Baran clan's scattered warriors and now the tribe's elders were gathered to discuss further measures.

"But where are the Baran clan's warriors?"

Ark surveyed the area and asked, causing Lariette's face to drop.

"Why are you looking like that?"

"That.....they're all of the Baran clan's warriors."

"Huh?"

Ark looked dumbly around the camp. He blinked a few times before smiling awkwardly.

"Is this a joke?"

"....."

"Where are the other warriors?"

".....That's it."

Lariette sighed while Ark felt like he had been hit by a hammer.

"In the old days, the warriors of the Baran clan swore to regain their lost home in the north. After scattering, they disciplined themselves to train for that day. They are waiting for the moment when the Pledge Beacon would be lit up."

That was the story Beseutyu told Ark about the warriors of the Baran clan. Wasn't it a wonderful story? After hearing the story, Ark had expected burly and muscular smurfs. If Gargamel appeared then strong smurfs would also show up. Thus Ark had been somewhat relieved. It wasn't a good situation but they might be able to do it with the help of the Baran clan's warriors. But the reality wasn't as wonderful as the legend.

“They look more like refugees than warriors. Have they even eaten anything?”

Dedric muttered while sitting on Ark’s shoulder. This time Ark 100% agreed with Dedric’s opinion. When he looked at the legendary Baran warriors, a sigh naturally came out. The Baran warriors were similar to the native people in a documentary he watched. Rather than having muscles like a warrior, they looked like they had been starving for 1 year. Of course, as a warrior they equipped armour and weapons but it was so tattered that it was difficult to tell it was armour. They looked more like descendants of beggars than warriors. In addition, there were only around 1,000 of them.....

“What is going on? It’s different from what I heard.”

Ark burst out while Lariette explained with embarrassment. When the Baran had been driven out of the north, the south was truly a bleak land. The warriors weren’t able to protect the Baran from being driven out so they felt a responsibility to help. So they left on a trip to harden and discipline themselves. The legend went up to there..... But the warriors forgot one important fact.

They were warriors. They didn’t know how to do anything except fight. The warriors couldn’t repair their own weapons or armour so they had to abandon it eventually when it was in tatters. Thus they were literally naked and lost in the wilderness. In addition, they didn’t know how to raise livestock or grow crops. The warriors also didn’t know how to forage ingredients. Even so, the warriors couldn’t abandon their pride to return to the clan. Fortunately, the Baran warriors barely managed to find sustenance every day. After 100 years, the barely surviving warriors looked like some African natives.

“When the Pledge Beacon was lit, the warriors quickly ran here and it is the first time they could eat a full meal.”

‘They’re similar to the refugee soldiers during the Warring states period.....how can it be okay if they’ve just started eating?’

Ark immediately became gloomy at Lariette’s words.

These soldiers were the main force fighting against the Hermes and Nakujuk Alliance? If he added in the combat difference between the two species then the result was already determined. No, the most likely scenario was that the Nakujuk would conquer the Netherworld. But an ‘absolute’ scenario did not exist in New World. The world would vary depending on the player’s choices, that was New World.

'When the Dark Brothers entered the war then a number of scenarios were likely overturned. And the Baran clan is still here. I might be able to gather the ordinary soldiers to fight against the Nakujuk like I did the raccoon clan. If the trainers are used well then that would be considerably powerful as well. Yes, it's still too early to be disappointed.'

Ark tried to think positively.

"But the problem isn't with the Baran clan's warriors."

"Yes, there's a bigger problem?"

".....Follow me. The elders of the Baran clan are gathered in that tent."

Lariette sighed and headed towards the tent. She looked so depressed that Ark started to feel uneasy. There was an even bigger problem than the disappointing warriors? Ark was about to trail after her with a concerned look when the rehabilitation members suddenly said.

"You, you, you, you, who is that woman?"

"Yes, what? I told you, she's Lariette-nim."

"The girl who was with Alan in the past?"

"Well, there are circumstances....."

Ark scratched his head while the rehabilitation members clamoured around him.

"You rascal, so you've been flirting with women while in the Netherworld?"

"Salivating over the enemy? Is that right?"

"What about Roco at the store?"

"Unforgivable! I will judge you in the name of justice."

"If you desert your first wife then you'll receive punishment!"

"What are you talking about?" My relationship with Lariette-nim isn't like that."

Ark's answer made the rehabilitation members jump.

"Ah, no?"

"Yes, I just happened to meet her here by chance. And what's with the first wife? Roco also isn't like that....."

Ark complained but the rehabilitation members were already not listening. The group exchanged suspicious glances and muttered.

"Huhuhu, nothing between them?"

"Meeting a maiden in a mysterious dimension gives off a somewhat good feeling."

"Hey, you saliva is dripping. That lady is mine."

"What the? You think I'll let you act freely?"

At any rate, the old bachelors squabbled among themselves.....

Ark sighed and shook his head.

"Please don't get any ideas. Lariette-nim has a boyfriend."

"Sheesh, I guess goal can't enter if there's already a goalkeeper?"

"Is that goalkeeper also a tycoon?"

Ark sank the rehabilitation members' hopes with a few words and headed towards the tent filled with elders. The ambiance of the tent was even more depressing than the rehabilitation members. There were 10 Baran clan elders gathered in the tent, who would open their mouths before sighing and closing it again. When Ark entered, there wasn't even a glance or a reaction. Beseutyu frowned at the elders' apathetic expressions and approached Ark.

"Ark, I heard from Lariette-nim. You came with reinforcements?"

"Yes, they're in front of the tents. But why is the atmosphere like this?"

"That is....."

Beseutyu explained the situation in a rough voice.

"Before you arrived, we learned that the Letter Movement Tower had been completed in the valley village. After moving some troops, the Nakujuk currently have 2,000 troops stationed in the south. They've already occupied most of the eastern region."

"2,000 already....."

The number felt like chewing a grain of sand in his mouth. The current power of the Baran clan's warriors.....numbered 1,000 beggars, 800 Dark Brothers, Ark and the rehabilitation group. On the other hand, the Nakujuk had 2,000 troops and that number would just increase thanks to the reception tower. Not only was quality a problem, but they were also inferior in numbers. The only way was to gather all the power of the Baran clan and oppose them.

"But what is being done here? The Nakujuk has already conquered the east so they have the materials needed to supply the war. Shouldn't we gather more troops quickly?"

"That....."

Beseutyu glanced at the elders. At that time, one of the silent elders tapped the table and opened his mouth.

"We have no intention of fighting the Nakujuk."

Ark looked bemused and thought he heard wrong for a moment.

"What?"

"I said we're not going to fight."

"And I asked what does that mean?"

Ark became incensed and the elder continued talking in a rough tone.

"Aren't you people foreigners? Why do you want to interfere in this matter between the Nakujuk and Baran? Of course, I roughly know the situation thanks to Beseutyu. I'm thankful you came from a distant place to help us. But as you saw, this is clearly not a situation where we can fight."

The elders nodded in agreement.

"You said you brought 800 reinforcements? You want to fight against thousands of Nakujuk with 800 people? Besides you are foreigners. If the situation becomes bad then you will give up in a moment. We can't entrust the lives of our clan to those kinds of people."

"Hey, isn't that too severe!"

Beseutyu shouted but the elders just turned their backs.

"That's enough, we don't want to hear anymore."

“Didn’t you see? The refugees gathered outside the tents are the warriors we believed in. We believed in a fantasy. Their appearance is symbolic of our plight right now.”

“We never had a chance from the moment the Nakujuk came from over the northern mountains to invade us. If we fight then we’ll die. But we might be able to live if we surrender. I’m sorry but we’re taking the possibility where there is a slight chance that we’ll live.”

“Beseutyu, you’re an elder of the clan so don’t you think their lives should come above anything else? Sometimes it is brave to accept humiliation.”

Ark was lost for words after the elders spoke. Ark was able to leave the Netherworld so it wasn’t his problem. He thought that the Baran clan thought like him. But they only considered Ark as a foreigner. The Baran were similar to most NPCs. They had been looking forward to the warriors’ appearance, but once it disappointed them and the situation changed then they lost all their courage. The Baran clan was afraid of war, and just like the raccoons they would not risk their lives on a foreigner’s word.

‘It’s my fault for not thinking ahead. But.....’

If the Baran wanted to abandon the war then it was a serious problem. He would instantly fail the <Study the Mirage> and <The Resurrection of the Netherworld’s World Tree> quests. In addition, the Dark Brothers had followed Ark to the Netherworld so there was no guarantee what would happen to his relationship with them. It was also a life or death matter for Ark. No, he didn’t have time to worry so far ahead. Ark was just sighing in frustration when a message window appeared in front of him.

-Shambala has used the ‘Trill’ skill on you.

Would you like to accept?

He accepted and Shambala’s furious voice shook his eardrums.

-You bastard, you dragged the Dark Brothers into this without confirming the situation properly? Raising Isabel’s expectations..... Anyway, you have to somehow resolve this. If the Dark Brothers advance into the Netherworld stops here and Isabel becomes disappointed then I will never let you go. You’ll be watching your back no matter where you go.

‘Damn, this guy is just rattling on and on.....’

Ark felt annoyance rise.

'Damn, what can I do? The raccoons ate drugs but there is no way I can use that method. It makes the head strange. That Shambala will see through it instantly. If that happens then both the Hermes guild and Shambala will want to kill me.'

Then Ark felt a sudden flash of light in his head.

'Wait, kill? Aha, I see. Okay, I might die either way so I'll use a plan of desperation. Where everyone will die together!'

Anyway, he had been cornered. What wouldn't he do?

-Okay, Shambala. I'll do something. But you'll have to help me.

Ark quickly explained his strategy to Shambala.

-.....I understand. I'll believe in you for the moment.

Shambala answered before Ark suddenly struck the table with his fist.

"Shut up!"

Ark used 'Intimidation' and shouted in a menacing voice. 'Intimidation' had a 50% success rate of persuading NPCs. However, if Ark failed to persuade the elders then he would receive a dreadful penalty. It was a plan of desperation.

'Now the dice has been thrown. I have no choice but to believe in Art of Communication and Intimidation.'

'Intimidation' also had the effect of causing stiffness so everyone in the room froze like a mouse. After a moment an elder opened his mouth and stuttered.

".....W-what did you say?"

"I said to shut up."

"What, what the? You dare.....!"

"Dare? How are you entitled to use that word?"

Ark spoke with an aggressive curl to his lips.

"Sometimes it is brave to accept humiliation? Ha, even a dog passing by would laugh at you. Okay, you can act like that. Feel free to surrender because of fear while calling yourselves brave for accepting humiliation. But can you speak those words

with confidence in front of your children? Beseutyu, are you brave enough to tell Bona to accept being a slave?"

"Ah, no....I....I'm not."

Beseutyu stuttered as he shook his head with embarrassment. Ark turned his piercing eyes and spoke to the other elders.

"I know what happened in the valley village. The residents were also Baran like you. But they fought bravely and sacrificed themselves for the children. I looked at them and saw how great the Baran clan was. I want to help somehow so I gathered my colleagues and came. But then what? You want to yield? Dammit, don't talk nonsense!"

Ark had thought of using 'Intimidation' to persuade them. But anger really started to well up when he began talking. He brought reinforcements for his own benefit and theirs as well, but now the original support army was so scared it wasn't willing to fight? Who wouldn't think it was absurd? Thanks to his frustration, Intimidation became more effective. Its effect showed immediately. Ark's bloody atmosphere overwhelmed the elders who didn't even dare to speak.

"I wonder what the children will see if they could see you now. Adults just giving up even though invaders are here to take their rights away....just rolling over obediently like a dog. I hope you still consider 'submitting to humiliation to be courage' when you see your children being treated like dogs."

Ark sent the elders a disgusting look before suddenly shouting.

"I'm sorry, I have a good personality but I can't stand seeing such dirty actions. Dark Brothers!"

"Yes, Ark-nim!"

"Dispose of all of them!"

Everybody's face was shocked by the end of Ark's words. Confusion was seen on the elders, the rehabilitation group, Lariette and even the Dark Brothers' faces. But Shambala unexpected smiled and nodded at the command.

"The Dark Brothers will obey Ark's command."

All the assassins in the tent suddenly held a dagger to the neck of the elders after the command.

“Ah Ark, what are you doing? These people are the elders of the Baran clan.”

Beseutyu looked at Ark with perplexed eyes. But Ark didn't even look at him and just stared at the frozen elders.

“Why am I doing this? Weren't you prepared to surrender to your enemies? That's funny. Why do you think I would spare you when you're giving up? So you can live to be a slave? Their purpose for invading is to exploit you for labour of course. But that will apply to young people and children. Old people like you will just be useless. What reason do they have to keep you alive?”

The elders flinched and thought 'we are quite old' as they looked at each other. Ark smiled pleasantly and continued.

“You're subservient yet you dare to mention courage. An old person like you would be thrown away like trash. How wonderful. Well, you're determined so there's no need to drag it out. You should die now so that your lives can be slightly useful. For my sake rather than the Baran family.”

“What?”

“Why are you surprised? As you said, I'm a foreigner so I have nothing to do with the Baran clan. So there's no reason for me to help the Baran clan. It's easier to negotiate with the Nakujuk with your heads cut off. Don't worry, I won't kill the rest of the Baran clan since the Nakujuk need them as slaves. And I'll tell your offspring. I'll tell them they have to live as slaves because of your courage. Oh, your descendants will be talking about your courage for centuries. How nice.”

“Why are you doing this to us?”

“Do you have a will? I'll pass it onto your family. Get rid of them!”

“I understand.”

The assassins raised their swords with surprise at his shout.

“W-wait a minute. We were too short-sighted.”

“Too short-sighted? What does that mean?”

“Yes, of course courage is needed to surrender. It is necessary. But it also requires courage to fight back..... Yes, that's right. We realized it after hearing your sincere advice. Isn't that right?”

“Ah, that's right, yes. You're sincerely worried and care about us.”

The elders' words went through a complete 180 degree change. If they heard threats while he was using 'Intimidation' then their tails would lower immediately. That's because people like them only thought of themselves. If the traffic police made a small mistake and the road got blocked off then people would get out of their cars and start raging at the police. But it was rare for people to run wild because of a blockage in the road. That's because people like that would turn around immediately if the police threatened them. It was reality.

"So it was just a joke and we don't intend to surrender. Actually, we confirmed how determined you were to help us. That's right, yes. Hahaha, it's good to see such determination. Now we know. We'll believe and follow you. The Nakujuk is our enemy! Of course we have to fight against them."

...Now they were making excuses?

Didn't they moan and complain towards Beseutyu? Anyway, the elders completely waved the white flag so an information window appeared.

-Your 'Intimidation' skill had a higher level of success so the proficiency has increased.

Intimidation (Advanced, Active): Intimidation isn't use cursing and scaring the opponent. It is also possible to persuade and threaten in the same conversation. You've become more skilful at adapting threats to the circumstances and can subdue the opponents using your charisma.

Mana consumption: 50

<The success rate of persuading NPCs is 60%. There's also a 60% chance of lowering a monster's morale and making them stiffen for 3 seconds. However, if you fail then hostility will increase by 60%>

Advanced Intimidation bonus effect: Charisma

<A dignified aura and experience dwells in your eyes. As a secondary effect of Intimidation, your ability to persuade NPCs in normal conversations will increase by 30%. Also, if you successfully intimidate a monster then there will be a 5% chance of the monster developing an 'Uncontrollable' state>

'Eh? What is this?'

Just like most of his skills, 'Intimidation' didn't increase after reaching 299 points. It was easy to reach intermediate level but some special enlightenment was needed to raise it to advanced. Using Intimidation to force the opponent to submit was

necessary to raise its proficiency. Thanks to the elders, his Intimidation increased to advanced and he also gained the side effect of charisma. It was killing two birds with one stone.

At this point JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members realised Ark's intention.

"Ark, I know your heart but please stop this."

"Yes, they were just testing us."

"Now they'll actively help."

".....I understand."

Ark spoke in a weaker voice. But he didn't forget to say one final thing to the elders.

"I'll watch a little more."

So the meeting proceeded after Ark's sincere (?) persuasion. The assassins surrounded the elders as the meeting of the Baran=Dark Brothers Allied forces began with Ark presiding over it as the commander. Of course he made decision using the majority wins system, but it wasn't that different from Ark reigning as a dictator as the elders listened to all his opinions.

"I understand the circumstances of both sides so I'll take command of the soldiers for the moment."

"I agree!"

"Like the elders said, the odds aren't in our favour if we clash with the Nakujuk in our present state. The Nakujuk have occupied the east so we should give up on that and strengthen our power."

"I agree!"

"Oh, before that I should get some rest....."

"I agree!"

Ark's power in the command tent was comparable to Hitler. They would all unanimously agree even if Ark suggested adding dog poo to the dinner menu.

'Huhuhu, this is the effect of Intimidation? But I should still be vigilant.'

“For a smooth connect between the tribes, the elders should stay here until the battle ends. If the elders are at the forefront then the soldiers will be able to obtain more courage. Don’t worry. They’ll risk their lives to protect the elders.”

The elders’ faces darkened at Ark’s words. It meant they were being held as hostages until the battle finished. Shambala and the rehabilitation members held their tongues as Ark distributed the tasks. Ark concentrated and sent a message to Shambala through Trill.

-Huhuhu, isn’t it wonderful? This is what I call administration.

-Really.....I’m lost for words.

Anyway, the Baran clan’s war preparations accelerated under Ark’s command.

Hyun-woo looked at the doctor with desperation. His mother had received her regular check-up three days ago. Patients with complex symptoms like his mother were subjected to a comprehensive examination once every two months. That’s because there was a limit to the doctor diagnosis if they just looked at the patient. Recovering patients in the ICU would often develop internal problems so they needed to be checked. If they did then they would have to be given stronger medication or in severe cases, undergo another surgery.

‘Fortunately, it has been 1 year since she’s had any problems.....’

It happened 2 years and 3 years ago, when her health which seemed to improve suddenly deteriorated. Therefore Hyun-woo could never hide his anxiety whenever he came to receive the test results.

‘It’ll be okay. These days Mother’s complexion has improved a lot. Obviously it will be fine.’

Hyun-woo placed his hands on his chest and prayed desperately.

“Patient number 809, Park So-mi.....”

The doctor muttered as he looked through the records on the monitor. It took longer than previous times. Was there a bad result somewhere? Hyun-woo looked at the monitor nervously. However, he couldn’t possibly understand any of the medical jargon. Doctors would normally use easier terms with patients and caregivers but there was no need for that on their records. Although things like ‘Cancer, dying soon’ were easily understood by patients.

“Hyun-woo ssi?”

Hyun-woo was interrupted while thinking useless thoughts. The doctor rotated his chair and faced Hyun-woo.

“Huh? Yes!”

Hyun-woo answered with a tense face but the doctor just smiled.

“Based on the results, your mother is improving at a very fast rate.”

“R-really?”

“Yes, after checking the records for the last 6 months I’m positive she’s entered a recovery period. There are no specific findings on the X-ray, MRI or blood tests. It is too early to tell if she can completely recover but at this rate there is some hope.”

“Thank you, thank you so much!”

Hyun-woo grasped the hand of the doctor and bowed. Fireworks lit up his head as he thought about the past few years. 5years.....this was the 6th year. He still remembered the first time he saw his mother lying in the ICU. His mother couldn’t even move a single finger by herself. No, she even relied on the doctors to blink her eyes. Hyun-woo honestly never believed that his mother could recover completely. He was just thankful that she was alive. That was 6 years ago. It was a short period but it felt so long. How much anxiety had he suffered during that short time?

But now the doctor told him there was hope. Hyun-woo normally didn’t like doctors, but in a hospital a doctor was like a god. The words of a doctor could beckon the patient and caregivers into either heaven or hell. Hyun-woo now felt like he was in heaven from the doctor’s positive words. And the doctor really looked like Buddha or God.

“It is thanks to the will of the patients and caregivers.”

The doctors also felt good when announcing excellent results. Thus the doctor spoke in a much lighter tone.

“It might be time to look at moving her to a hospital outpatient.”

“Outpatient?”

“Yes, we’ll continue to monitor the prognosis but if the results are maintained for the next check-up in two months then we’ll switch her status to outpatient. Fortunately, Park So-mi has been tolerating it well but sometimes a long hospitalization can be

mentally exhausting. Changing the environment is often helpful in recovering. I'm hoping it's the same for Park So-mi.

Your mother is also eager to reduce the hospital costs. Therefore, the doctor will recommend that she become an outpatient."

If his mother continued improving at the next check-up in two months, she would be switched to an outpatient status. Hyun-woo's head felt like it was spinning in circles from the good mood. He could live with his mother once again! How long had he been waiting for this? Hyun-woo flew out of the doctor's office.

"Mother, did you hear? You might become an outpatient after two months!"

"Yes, I heard just now."

His mother laughed and pointed towards the nurse holding a syringe.

"If it ends up like that...."

Hyun-woo felt his heart rattle and sat down at his mother's words. Wasn't this like scattering vinegar on noodles?

"What are you saying? Of course it should be like that. Even the doctor is confident this time. Do you think living in hospital is better than living with me?"

"Don't say such a silly thing."

"So don't sound so weak again. Then I'll really be angry."

Hyun-woo grumbled like a three year old child. He could fight gangsters in the street or persuade NPCs in New World with flattery, yet Hyun-woo was like a mere child in front of his mother. No, he wanted to be a child.

"Okay, I understand."

His mother laughed and nodded his head. Hyun-woo's chest tightened at the sound of his mother's bright laugh. The happy energy swelling made him feel like he was going to explode! It really seemed like he was going to die from his heart exploding.

"What is it? What? Mother, what else do you want to have? No, what do you need as an outpatient? Ah, yes clothes! Clothes. Shall I buy a few things for you to wear?"

"What, already.....and there's still a lot of my old clothes at home."

"Those things have already gone out of fashion."

"It's fine. When have I ever paid attention to my clothes?"

'That's why I want to buy them.'

Hyun-woo thought with sadness welling in his throat. His mother had been hospitalized and stayed in one room for several years. He had to live in a one bedroom apartment which didn't allow deposits. Thus he had to sell or give away many second hand goods. It was when he was clearing his mother's clothes that Hyun-woo suddenly realized.

'These are my mother's clothes?'

They were vaguely familiar yet he wasn't used to seeing them..... Hyun-woo then started paying attention to his mother's attire. Mother, because she was a mother.....had no interest in what clothes she was wearing or what she ate. But tears fell when he looked at his mother's clothes again. They were clothes she bought at the market and instead of buying new ones when it got torn, he could see traces of stitch marks. It was the same for his father's clothes. There were many faded clothes with a musty odour that seemed to be over 10 years old.

.....His parents had been wearing those clothes. Their spoiled son would spend 200,000 won or 300,000 won on new jeans or ask for new clothes every season while his parents had been wearing those types of clothes. He hadn't known. Although he had been raised with love, he never truly realised his parent's love until he was eighteen. Their spoiled son was moody and didn't want to spend any time with them until they were yanked away when he was eighteen. No, he hadn't tried to understand.

'I won't make the same mistakes.'

Hyun-woo had vowed on that day. He learned how to give up and how to stay down. He couldn't learn how to be tough from books or dramas. He had been taught it with force. All of it was for his mother. So what if they couldn't afford designer handbags? Or a new car?

"Mother, just focus on your health and don't worry. When you become an outpatient then I'll buy you delicious food and fashionable clothes. Understood?"

"Thank you for your words."

"They're not just words!"

"Okay, I understand." You've surprised the nurse."

His mother soothed him like a child when Hyun-woo raised his voice.

"I.....I'm fine. It's time for your physical therapy now."

"Ah, yes. Nurse-nim, thank you. Thank you very much. Take good care of my mother!"

Hyun-woo bowed many times and left the hospital room.

"You have a really good son."

"Yes.....that is my son. My only son."

His mother looked towards the door of the hospital room with tearful eyes after the nurse's words. Hyun-woo was still in an ecstatic mood as he left the hospital. He would do whatever it took for his mother. If his mother felt better than he would feel better as well.

"Ah, Hwa-rang ajusshi!"

The first person who came to his mind was Gwon Hwa-rang. Yes, Gwon Hwa-rang would be delighted by news of his mother's recovery. He would always call him after receiving the test results. Hyun-woo didn't want to convey the news over a phone so he took a bus towards Gwon Hwa-rang's house.

"Ohhhh, is that true?"

"Congratulations!"

"Damn, finally.....Noonim(more polite way of saying older sister).....!"

"Since it is like this. We need some celebratory gifts!"

"Yes, shouldn't we spend money on an occasion like this? Ya, the money!"

Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members were delighted. But the sight of the huge men running back and forth was quite funny. Although they wanted to go to the hospital immediately, Gwon Hwa-rang suddenly spoke.

"But Hyun-Woo, where will your mother live when she is an outpatient?"

"Huh?"

Hyun-woo was startled and looked at Gwon Hwa-rang. Come to think of it, that was the most important thing he needed. His mother was coming home. He had been too

busy celebrating that he never thought about it. The place Hyun-woo currently lived in was rented. It was a box filled with a TV, computer, scattered clothes and the game unit. In addition, the bathroom was inconveniently outside. How could he bring his sick mother to such a place? If his mother was discharged then she also needed a bed. Of course, she also needed a proper sized bathroom that was indoors. And it should be close to a hospital and on the 1st floor thanks to her wheelchair. That was the minimum conditions. Obviously, he only needed it after two months but he couldn't prepare a new residence in just one or two days.

"I have to start checking from now on."

"It won't be easy finding a home that matches those conditions....."

Gwon Hwa-rang spoke in a worried voice but one of the rehabilitation members just laughed and came forward.

"Hyung-nim, have you forgotten what I specialize in?"

The person who said this was Yoo An-gook. He was a former real estate conman and his nickname in the rehabilitation group was Bu Dong-san (Real Estate).

"You can trust me."

"No way, you better not practice a scam on our younger brother." "Just wait a moment. I'll find you an amazing home in an instant. Bu Dong-san still has experience in this."

Bu Dong-san started walking around on his phone.

"Ooh.....really? The conditions that I mentioned? Ah ah, really? Hey, isn't that really good? Where? I understand. I'll go with some other guys right now so please wait. Okay, I'm going now."

After approximately 30 minutes, Bu Dong-san hand up the phone.

"Hyung-nim and I have to go now. Hyun-woo, you come as well."

"Huh? Right now?"

"It's good timing to find a nice house. So you should come along."

Bu Dong-san, Gwon Hwa-rang and Hyun-woo visited a house near the hospital.

"President Kim, it's me. Show me the house you mentioned earlier."

It had only been an hour since he mentioned it yet Hyun-woo was already visiting a house. He always thought this, but Gwon Hwa-rang and the rehabilitation members' energy had always been unthinkable. The house President Kim guided them to was a house with a small garden and 3 floors.

"The main house is the 1st floor while the 2nd and 3rd floors are rented out. The owners have to be in a foreign country for a few years so they want to rent out the 1st floor while they're abroad. It should fit the criteria you mentioned perfectly. I spoke to the owner while I was waiting. Let's enter and I'll give a more detailed explanation."

"Uh, this house is.....?"

Hyun-woo tilted his head to one side as he followed President Kim inside. The house didn't look that different but when he went inside, he saw that the structure was strange. Iron rods were installed from the front door to the living room and on the walls next to the living room. The iron rods didn't ruin the interior but why would they even install iron rods in the first place? Hyun-woo had been thinking that when the landlord appeared.

"Have you come to see the house?"

"Yes, this is the young man I described earlier."

The landlord suddenly grabbed Hyun-woo's hand at the end of President Kim's words.

"I've heard about your situation. It's hard but please have strength."

"Huh? What are you.....?"

"I heard that you wanted a house you could live in with your sick mother. In fact, the circumstances are also similar to us. My father collapsed a few years ago and he still has limited mobility. We installed these rods to avoid any inconvenience for him when he lived here."

Now Hyun-woo could see the reasons for the rods. They were to help the sick father who had difficulties sometimes. It reminded him of the waist high railings he saw installed in the hospital hallways. It wasn't just the living room. The bathroom was also designed to be easy to use for a patient.

"My father is now going to live at a rehabilitation hospital in a foreign country for a while. It is a quite well-known facility. But I didn't want to leave the house like this so I've been looking for a tenant who could use it."

Hyun-woo was impressed by the landlord's attention to detail.

'I still have a long way to go!'

He was so busy celebrating that he hadn't consider the thing his mother needed most.... Anyway, Hyun-woo really liked the house. It might seem inconvenient but it was the best environment for people with disabilities to live in. Besides, it was also closer to the hospital than the place Hyun-woo was currently living in. Hyun-woo knew how difficult it was to find a house that perfectly matched all his conditions.

"When are you going abroad?"

"The weather is still cold so we'll be going in a month or two."

It was just in time! At this point, Hyun-woo knew that the house was perfect for his purpose. If he missed this chance then he didn't know when he would find a house like it again.

"I'll take it."

Then the landlord laughed softly and nodded.

"I guess your circumstances are similar to ours. I'm thankful that you will move in."

He couldn't remember what happened after that. Thanks to Bu Dong-san, President Kim cut the real estate brokerage fee and Hyun-woo and the landlord went over the contract. He had a satisfied expression but once he looked back, Hyun-woo felt like screaming.

'Ack, w-what have I done.....?'

He liked the house 100% There were no regrets in that regard. But the problem was the money for the house. It was 80,000,000 won. Normally it would be 90,000,000 but the landlord understood Hyun-woo's circumstances and took 10,000,000 off. It was still a considerable amount of money but Hyun-woo thought it was possible. Thanks to the deposit from the last auctions, he currently had 45,000,000 won in his bank account. He had to pay the hospital bills for the last two months so that was 20,000,000 won left for the deposit money.

'I need 60 million won. Fortunately, Ark had 5,000 gold so I can cash that in at any time. I have to somehow save another 1,000 gold in the next two months.'

Hyun-woo thought this and signed the contract. But he was careless and forgot an important fact. Ark's bag clearly had 5,000 gold. But a few days ago, he had invested

3,500 gold into creating a store. Thanks to that, his remaining money was 1,500 gold. His gold had recovered thanks to Sid and the unicorn horn he obtained. In other words, the amount he had to make in two months was 4,500 gold not 1,000 gold! If he didn't earn the money in two months than the 20 million won he used to sign the contract would be taken away.

"Perhaps if you have insufficient funds...."

Gwon Hwa-rang had whispered to him while they were returning. And Bu Dong-san who was holding the steering wheel chuckled.

"Is this a trick to prepare a newlywed house?"

"This brat what are you saying....Hyun-woo, don't misunderstand. It's not like that."

"I know. But I'll save up my balance."

Gwon Hwa-rang looked dissatisfied at Hyun-woo's answer but he didn't say anything else. Of course, the reason Hyun-woo refused Gwon Hwa-rang's offer wasn't because of Bu Dong-san's joke. If his mother remarried then the only possible person was Gwon Hwa-rang. He hadn't changed his mind about that. However, preparing his mother's remarriage and renting a house was different. Hadn't he vowed to do everything in his power for his mother?

'45,000,000 won in two months....!'

Hyun-woo clenched his teeth together tightly.

Okay, he would do whatever it took to raise it! Hyun-woo's tenacious spirit knew there was only one way to raise that money.

'I didn't just waste that 3,500 gold. It is investment. I'll be able to recover a certain amount after two months. And I'll receive a considerable amount of money when I complete Magaro's quest. Yes, that will possibly be sufficient. I have to quickly earn money and save it from the Netherworld!'

Hyun-woo entered the unit without changing his clothes when he got home.

'Money, earn money for my mother!'

The game unit vibrated and Hyun-woo was once again in New World. Ark's eyes when he returned to New World was even more thirsty for money.

"Show me the money!"

Ark's roar echoed through New World.

Act 4: War is Business

[TL Notes: Some people were asking questions about the house situation from the last chapter. Gyopolife left an informative comment which explained it so I've copied it below. If you want more information then you can also go to this link: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeonse>

Gyopolife: The 80 million won deposit is jeonse. Korea has a unique housing rental system in which you can deposit 50%-80% of the home/apt value and live there for 2 years. After the contract ends you receive your deposit back.]

"We don't have much time."

Ark had triggered a coup and established a military government. The Nakujuk had thousands of troops while the Baran clan only had 500~1000 warriors. However, Ark knew that the Letter Movement Tower had already been completed in the valley village. It was make it easier for them to move more troops to the south.

"But the letter movement has limitations on its uses. It needed the Letter Movement Orb was required for the reception tower. And the Nakujuk shouldn't possess that many of the orbs."

"Why?"

Shambala asked slowly. Ark kindly explained it to Shambala.

"There are various reasons but the main reason is that they only built one reception tower in the village. The Magic Institute previously determined that letter movement used some kind of radio waves. And it can only move a limited number of people until the necessary energy recharges."

"I see what you mean."

Shambala finally started to understand the circumstances.

"If they had enough Letter Movement Orbs then they would've constructed a lot of reception towers for fast transfer of troops. But there are no signs of that. In other

words, there is no point in them constructing several towers. But the tower they constructed is sufficient for the Letter Movement Orbs they have.”

“That’s right.”

To put it simply, it was like constructing something in Starcraft. If there were overflowing materials then they could construct a lot of barracks. However, there was no point in increasing the barracks when there were only a few materials.

“That’s why there is no time. If there is a limit to how many troops they can move at one time then they’ll probably attack when they have the maximum amount. So the Nakujuk will probably attack in one week when they have 5,000 troops.”

“Wait, 5000 in one week? Where did you come up with such a number?”

“.....Of course I did some maths.”

Ark laughed at Shambala’s question with a twinkle in his eye.

“Beseutyu previously checked the rate of construction of the Reception tower in the valley village. It took around one week in reality. But the reception tower wasn’t finished yet. They just moved the Letter Movement Orb there after 1 week. So looking at tower’s degree of completion and the amount of troops they were able to move, I can estimate that they will move 300~400 in one day after the tower is completed.

“That means we have to be ready for war in one week. If they can increase their troops by 300~400 in one day then they’ll have an extra 2,100~2,800 in a week. They currently have 2,000 people so they would end up with 5,000 troops.”

“Does everything make sense now Shambala?”

Ark tried to act cool by pretending to raise invisible glasses. Shambala turned his face and snorted.

“Sheesh, what a smartass.....”

“I’m not being a smartass, just showing my brain’s incredible reasoning power.”

Anyway, the uncertain enemy troops now became known. It gave Ark’s group one week. In the meantime, they had to be prepared to fight 5,000 troops. But Ark no longer needed to involve himself in this. Ark’s usual code of conduct was to ‘entrust it to people who can do well.’ It was stupid to do it alone when someone else might

be able to do it better. And didn't Ark now have JusticeMan who was a military expert?

"JusticeMan ajusshi, can you do it?"

"Huhuhu, I was in a similar situation when confronting anti-government guerrillas in South America."

Anti-government guerrillas in South America? The more he heard of it, the most he thought JusticeMan's past sounded like an action movie. The fact that he wasn't bluffing was more frightening. It was why people like Lee Myung-ryong were so respectful towards JusticeMan. Anyway, Ark delegated all authority regarding military matters to him.

In fact, Ark's role as the Commander was quite mixed. In New World, dozens of people was classified as a party, hundreds of people as a raid and thousands of people separated into corps. In a party, everyone had the same authority. However, the configuration becomes complicated for a raid group. The raid commander could appoint a leader from each party. Then the organization became further complicated when it came to the corps. The leader of the troop would appoint two deputies who served underneath him.

Ark selected JusticeMan and Lariette to become the deputies. JusticeMan naturally took over all roles regarding military matters. And Lariette was an Innocence Knight so she could apply various buffs and bonuses to the entire corps. After leading Dark Eden, Ark was already aware of the attack configurations so he knew how the special effects of the deputies appointed could be applied. And right now, the one with the most powerful special effect was Lariette the Innocence Knight.

"I'll work hard."

Lariette's face became determined after she received the title. Once he chose JusticeMan, he left further military matters up to him.

"The most urgent problem is building defense military facilities and moving military equipment, as well as training the troops we conscripted from the Baran clan to fill up the insufficient numbers."

"Have you considered a base?"

"Beseutyu gave me a rough map of the southern region of the Netherworld. Every region in the Netherworld is separated by mountain ranges. The Nakujuk in the valley village is currently stationed in the south-east. If they want to advance to the south-west then they'll inevitably have to pass through here."

JusticeMan spread out the map and pointed towards one spot. It was a canyon located in the lower section of the Golgi Mountains.

"I heard from Beseutyu that there was a long abandoned castle in this area. It is almost in ruins but it is better than nothing. Hopefully we'll be able to convert it to a stronghold. Once we've repaired Haman castle then I'll have to train the troops."

"Will it be ready in a week?"

JusticeMan considered for a while before asking Ark a question.

"How long do we need to endure to achieve your goal?"

It might not be obvious but his goal wasn't to win the war. The Baran defeating the Nakujuk who came to the south and then marching north to the Nakujuk was.....naturally impossible. In this war, his goal was to stop the Nakujuk conquering the Netherworld and gaining some time. Ark had to hold on until the right time.

"If we consume one week on war preparations then the remaining time is one week. We'll have to hang on for a minimum of one week."

"We'll be able to do that much anyway."

Thus they moved to Haman fortress and began preparations for war. It was also the first time all the Baran tribes in the south gathered together. Thanks to Ark holding the elders hostage, there was no real issues. Thus they gathered 2,000 Baran troops in a matter of days. Combined with the warriors and the Dark Brothers, the combined forces were 3,800. It couldn't compare to the Nakujuk, but they might be able to fight against them with those numbers.

"But only the 800 Dark Brothers can be used properly. The rest were just extra. There wasn't enough time for proper military training.....but he might be able to train their individual skills.

Thus the Baran group was given full-fledged military training. JusticeMan also divided them into troops based on their specialities. And he left their training to the rehabilitation members with the right skills. The 1,000 Baran warriors were divided into the assault groups. Of course, the ones who took over their training were the 'Guardian=Assaulter' which was Bul-kkun and two other people. The members of the Baran clan experienced in cartography and hunting was organized into the scouting unit. Yapsab and two other members who changed to 'Guardian=Scout' took charge of this unit. And the farmers and architects made up the Engineer unit and they were led by Bu Dong-san and two others who had changed professions to

'Guardian=Engineer.' And finally, a number of old veterans like Beseutyu was trained by Jjak-tung who had changed professions to 'Guardian=Strategist.'

Ark felt a little worried about JusticeMan's decisions.

'JusticeMan ajusshi is an expert but the other hyungs have never trained anyone so will they be able to teach the Baran?'

However, Ark's worries disappeared on the first day of the training camp.

"The children can't get it straight?"

"If you can't do it well then you'll have to duck walk for two kilometres!"

"Hiieeeek!"

The Baran clan burst out screaming. The rehabilitation members had received personal training in tactics from JusticeMan. However, the rehabilitation members weren't strangers to it. All the rehabilitation members had been called for the mandatory military training in South Korea. During those two years, they trained in tactics, discipline and drills. While it didn't show in their social lives, all of the men in South Korea had military training. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that it was South Korea's potential. In addition, the rehabilitation members were people with gloomy pasts who used to live in the dark. It was a requirement of those organizations to discipline their subordinates. Thanks to that, the Baran clan experienced a nightmarish training in the Netherworld under their dreadful instructors.

"Eh? What am I seeing?"

"You can't die from this level of discipline."

"Even the reserve corps in South Korea can train to this degree."

"If you fall behind in this simulation training then brace yourselves!"

"The slogan of our unit is defeat evil!"

Each of the rehabilitation members led hundreds of troops so they burned with competition. They pressed the Baran hard because of that.

"Oooh, I'm going to die from this training."

"I want to fight with the Nakujuk as soon as possible."

The Baran were so tired that they were even saying those kinds of things. Anyway, the training was effective. Two days later, or 6 days in game time, the forces had managed to get used to the system and were able to somewhat take advantage of each other's specialities. In particular, the assault troops showed tremendous growth. Although they looked like refugees, they were people who had inherited the Baran's warrior lineage. The rehabilitation member's training developed their potential and strength and they were now able to match the Nakujuk warriors. Their forgotten battle skills also manifested quickly. In addition, the scouting unit and the Dark Brothers went through joint training while the engineer troops levelled up their skills by repairing Haman Fortress.

"Okay, now I don't have to worry about that."

Ark nodded his head with satisfaction after observing some of the Baran's training. But the next day Ark had to face a problem he never considered.

"Ark-nim, gathering the weapon supplies isn't as easy as I thought."

Lariette sighed as she spoke. While the rehabilitation members were assigned to training, Lariette had been responsible for requisitioning munitions from the southern villages. The Baran clan was a race which centred on farming, raising livestock or extracting minerals. So when the elders first started requisitioning, they were able to gather an overflowing amount of food and minerals. But they could not gather the most important military materials, weapons and armour. Of course, even the Baran clan had blacksmiths. However they were only experienced with rakes or shovels and had never created a weapon. Not only was there no weapons, the Baran clan's equipment was like the Bronze Age while the Nakujuk was the Iron Age.

Daeng kang!

"Huk! The handle broke!"

It was normal for the handle of a spear to break during training. If the handle broke then the spear or javelin wouldn't be able to be thrown. There was no need to explain the importance of weapons in a war. It wasn't an exaggeration to say the performance of the weapon affect the combat power in a game.

'Unbelievable. Every time something is fixed then another problem occurs.'

Ark continuously sighed. Weapons production was the most important problem that needed to be solved at the moment. Even if he started properly training a blacksmith now, it would take a while for them to be able to produce weapons. It took a great deal of time and money to become a skilled blacksmith.

‘Well, the Baran clan is able to obtain the ores necessary for production.....’

Wait, why had he never thought about that?

“Leave the problem to me.”

Ark immediately used the Dimensional Movement Powder to return to Lancel village. He visited the raccoon clan and showed them the ore from the Netherworld.

“This ore. What do you think about it?”

“Ohu, it is a very high purity ore. Where did you get it from?”

The raccoons were craftsmen so they felt greedier for the ore than money. As expected, the raccoon clan showed signs of desire as they were shown the ore. Ark grinned and made a proposal.

“In fact, I’m visiting with a request. Would you make weapons for me if I supplied you with this ore? As much as possible. I really need weapons so I’ll also supply the coal and whetstone. Please take the ore as payment for the weapons.”

“You’ll pay for all of it using the ore?”

The raccoon clan thought for a moment before nodding.

“We accept. Ore is similar to money for us so it’s not a problem. And this is a good ore so we’re quite greedy for it.”

That was the method Ark came up with. He took the ores from the Baran clan and commissioned the raccoon clans to produce weapons.

‘Now the problem of weapons supply will be solved. In addition.....’

Ark laughed after the raccoons entered into the weapons supply agreement. The munitions were the property of the NPC. Although Ark was the Commander, he couldn’t just embezzle it. So although Ark saw the munitions piled up in Haman Fortress, he could only swallow his saliva. Then he had a brilliant idea after hearing Lariette’s words. Currently, Ark made all the decisions as the Commander. He couldn’t take the war materials, but he could use the goods to barter for war preparations.

‘I’m in the middle so I won’t be able to profit if I deal directly with the raccoons.’

The raccoons signed a contract to trade one weapon for one ore and coal. There was no way for someone in the middle to profit. But who was Ark? Using cheap tricks, wouldn't Ark be able to obtain coffee from a well?

'Huhuhu, there's also a handling fee when trading through an intermediary agent.'

The method Ark devised involved Ark's Comprehensive Store in Lancel village. Using this method, Ark's store received 1,000 ores from the Netherworld. At this stage, the ores still belonged to the NPCs. That was the key. The store would pass the ores to the raccoons who created 10 weapons out of them. The deluxe weapons of the raccoon family had considerable value to the Baran who didn't have a method of developing advanced weapons. So during the war, he could barter and increase the value to 1,200 ores. Ark would then hand over the ores again for weapons production. In other words, except for the first time he paid 1,000 ores he was able to get an extra 200 ores with every transaction afterwards. It was like someone else arranging the table while he picked up the spoon. This was just his handling charge.

'I get 200 ores for every 10 weapons. It is enough to create one weapon. Presently, we need approximately 1,000 weapons and armour. All that work will give me 20,000 ores. I could make a profit of at least 2,000 gold if I could sell all the weapons and armours!'

All Ark had to do was go back and forth between Lancel village and the Netherworld carrying the ores. Of course, he had to use the Dimensional Movement Powder every time but there was still a lot left. Besides, was the powder necessary once the Netherworld rose to middle earth? It would be like swimming on land!

'Hahaha, war is also money!'

"Buksil, you will carry the weapons between Lancel village and the Netherworld!"

Ark made Buksil who was a profession merchant in charge of the trade route. At the end of the deal, Ark would be able to embezzle approximately 2,000 gold. In addition, the Baran clan's lack of equipment was quickly solved. At that time, Ark also discovered that the weapons produced by the blacksmiths weren't all the same. Just like Ark could create an 'A la carte' dish, the blacksmiths created 50~60 deluxe weapons. Of course, the stats for the deluxe items were significantly better than an equivalent item.

A Masterpiece Adamantium Sword (Magic)

Weapon type: One-handed sword

Attack: 33~38

Durability: 400/400

Weight: 50

User restriction: Level 200 and more

An adamantium sword created using the ore from the Netherworld. The craftsman put his heart and soul into it and created a rarely seen masterpiece. Compared to a regular item, the performance of the deluxe item is at least 10% better. In addition, it will steadily make fine adjustments to the user's hand.

<Option: Probability of destroying armour +20%, Reaction rate +10%>

"Usually a masterpiece will be more expensive because of the labour put into it, but I will give it to Ark-nim for the same price."

'Jackpot!'

Ark purchased the deluxe items and then sold them to the rehabilitation members for a more expensive price. Even the rehabilitation members needed weapons and armour. There was no reason to sell a deluxe item for cheaper than the market price.

"It's usually 40~50 gold but I'll give these to hyung for 30 gold."

The rehabilitation members' eyes shone like lanterns at Ark's words.

"As expected, we only have you."

Thanks to that, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members were able to purchase deluxe goods. The rehabilitation members received better equipment while Ark's wallet became warmer.

'But it's still lacking. I need 45 million won in two months!'

In fact, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members knew that Ark would get a profit from it. But they didn't care about something like that. They knew the reason why Ark's personality was a little strange. Thanks to the lease contract, JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members wanted to somehow help Ark. They also knew Ark wouldn't accept such one-sided help so they wanted him to swindle them. It was a fair price for them. They bought it with the money they saved.

But Ark's opinion was firm. It was the one part Ark was sure about.

"I'll pay 50 gold for these items...."

"No, it is 30 gold."

Ark thought of the rehabilitation group as brothers so he didn't want them to lose money. However, he wouldn't hesitate to swindle other users or NPCs. That was his firm standards for money. It was why the rehabilitation members knew that Ark wasn't just about money, money, money. After a few days, he ended up securing 1,000 weapons and an information window appeared.

<Relevant Investment Information Window>

Thanks to Ark's Comprehensive Store's brisk trade, the commercial value of Lancel village has increased. The reputation of Lancel village has increased and Ark's contribution has increased by 10. The maximum number of shares you can own has increased by 1%.

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit): 4/6%

'Huhuhu, it was worth the trouble.'

That was the reason why Ark did the transactions through the store. Trading the materials through Ark's store was a huge process. In addition, the raccoon clan who were NPC residents could also learn money. Thanks to his achievements, the commercial value of the town rose and his upper limit for shares increased as well. Ark nodded with satisfaction before looking at Dedric and Razak.

"Come on, do you think you can just play around?"

"Eh? We're going to train as well?"

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack?

Dedric and Razak stepped back with a wince.

"Of course. Aren't you motivated watching the Baran clan become stronger?"

"What the, we've already gone through a professional course so why do we have to be compared to those things? We're resting and storing our power so that we can comfortably use it during an important moment in battle! It is better to hunt than go through basic training."

He couldn't say anything.....

Dedric's words weren't completely wrong. In fact, Dedric and Razak had increased their power several times through high intensity training. Therefore, their performance rate for the operations was over 90%. Their ability to adapt in a crisis was also considerable. That's why they were able to help Ark deal with monsters 100 levels above them. So there was no reason for them to receive basic training like the Baran.

'But it's a different story if they can raise their skill proficiency.'

Recently, Ark had discovered through Radun that using 'Affection' could increase the skills of his pets. However, the skill didn't rise if he just invested Affection into it. Ark and his pets also had to gain an understanding of the skill in order to raise it.

'I don't have to increase the understanding of the skills through training. I can increase their understanding by utilizing the skills while hunting. The japtem and experience will also be a bonus. Furthermore, Affection might increase if I accept the opinions of my pets.'

"Okay, let's go hunting."

While the Baran were busy training, Ark dedicated himself to hunting around the area. He forgot himself and a week quickly passed by. While he was hunting, Shambala and the Dark Brothers had been scouting the Nakujuk and finally returned to the fortress.

"Ark, they've begun advancing into the western region."

Finally the war had started.

Chae chang, seokeok!

The sharp sounds iron and flesh being cut rang out. An enemy appeared in front of him while swinging his sword. He blinked once and paid careful attention. Being able to detect the sharp sword would save his life. It was a battlefield.

'How long will this battle last?'

Ark thought as he knocked down the group of Nakujuk. It was already the 5th day of fighting against the Nakujuk and dozens of battles had been fought. As expected, the Nakujuk had 5,000 troops. On the other hand, the Baran managed to gather a few more troops and increased their numbers to 4,500. The numbers were almost equal but the combat power between the Nakujuk who was a warrior tribe and the civilian

Baran clan was completely different. Despite the high intensity training, there was a limit to how much they could learn in a week. The Baran clan were defeated many times in the early stages and were pushed towards the first defensive wall they built in the canyon.

‘If it wasn’t for JusticeMan then the Baran clan would already be wiped out.’

Ark looked at JusticeMan who was standing on a hill overlooking the battle. In fact, JusticeMan had already foreseen what would happen in the early stages. Because the early strategy was to preserve the troops rather than maintaining the high ground. But they strategy changed to counter-attacking once the Nakujuk marched into the canyon. JusticeMan chose the strategy of ‘Backtracking.’ When the Nakujuk moved from point B to point A, they would backtrack and attack point B. The war of NPCs in New World was also similar to wars in reality. In other words, they had to secure a supply route if the troops wanted to continue marching. If they lost the supply route then they would run out of food and weapons and armour won’t be able to be repaired. In addition, the soldiers would feel anxious and their morale would start to fall. Of course, the Nakujuk had to move back to point B to secure the supply route again. Then JusticeMan would build a defensive structure at point A. Thanks to that, the Nakujuk were now only able to advance near the entrance of the canyon.

Of course, this strategy had been used since ancient times. The NPCs might not know about it so Jewel’s group would see through it immediately. However, ‘knowing’ about it and ‘stopping’ it were different issues. Thus the strategy they envisioned was a success! In the ever changing battlefield, it was difficult to make a RTS succeed but it was possible using real-time simulation games. Now to mention the field in New World was reminiscent of an actual battlefield. JusticeMan and Lariette also had an enormous impact on the battlefield. Without JusticeMan’s expertise and Lariette’s special abilities, it would be impossible to succeed. Of course, the rehabilitation members and the Dark Brothers also helped execute the strategy.

“Ah ah ah, I’m going to kill everybody!”

“The weak Baran are acting so arrogantly!”

The Nakujuk had thought the battle was going to be easy so they eagerly rushed forward. Although the Baran’s line of defense collapsed, JusticeMan just waited and said.

“Heh, they’ve started to lose control after 40 minutes. Their flanks are spread widely thanks to them eagerly rushing forward. Dark Brothers, Intercept Operation!”

Lariette cast her 'glow' at JusticeMan's command. The Innocence Knight always caused a glow whenever she used a skill. The Dark Brothers had been hiding using 'Stealth.'

Kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang!

There was a huge sound as hundreds of Dark Brothers emerged and used backstab. The Nakujuk had already been missing quite a lot of health thanks to the battle so they quickly collapsed.

"Ugh, w-where did they come from.....!"

"F-fall back. Retreat from their attack range and rearrange the formation."

"But we've already entered too deeply into enemy territory. If we retreat then all the troops will be isolated."

"Send the Draken unit to support them."

The shout emerged from the confused group of Nakujuk. And after a while, dozens of Draken rushed across the battlefield.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

It was the Draken who could fly freely in the sky and had immense attacks! They were so strong that they were able to face 10 of the Baran clan's monsters. They always appeared in a decisive moment to cause a crisis among the Baran. However, this time emergence of the Draken was an opportunity for JusticeMan.

"Tactical units, intercept the Drakens!"

After the command was issued, hundreds of soldiers on the hills on both sides of the canyon raised their bodies.

"Don't spread the attacks. Concentrate on one target and attack."

Jjak-tung used his skill to place clear signs above the Draken's head.

"It's this one for the moment. It is an all-out attack. Exterminate them!"

Tu tu tu tung, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Firing sounds were heard from the tactical unit's hands as hundreds of artillery hit the Draken at the same time, causing it to spew blood and collapse. Ark had commissioned cannons from the raccoon family. The cannon was a perfect weapon

for the tactical units. The tactical unit was smart but powerless so they couldn't face the Nakujuk directly. This wasn't a problem if they attacked from long distance. And cannons were classified as a machine rather than a weapon, so they showed higher performances when used by NPCs. In addition, the tactical units was led by Jjak-tung who was a 'General=Strategist.' One of the skills Jjak-tung learned was 'Feng Shui.' When used in battle, 'Feng Shui' increased the effect of terrain by 50%. In other words, the cannon had extra damage and accuracy when fired from a higher position. Feng Shui increased these effects by 50%.

'Ugh, this, unbelievable.....!'

The Nakujuk could only watch as one Draken fell after another. Just like that, the tactical units instantly handled the Draken and started attacking the Nakujuk. They fired from the top of the hill towards the bottom. Also the Nakujuk were closely gathered in the canyon so it was easy to hit them! When shooting the cannon, there was no way it could miss. Jjak-tung shouted with excitement on his face.

"Attack, attack, attack! No signs are required for these guys. Just fire blindly!"

Tu tu tu tung, tu tu tu tung!

The artillery fell from the sky like a shower of rain, causing the Nakujuk's camp to collapse. But this was still only a skirmish.

-The guard towers 1, 2 and 3 have been completed on top of the hill!

"That's it!"

Ark had been waiting for that message to appear. While the battle had been going on, Bu Dong-san had split the engineer unit to construct three towers on top of the hill. Of course, they didn't have that much time so the towers weren't strong or durable. But the Nakujuk had to break through the 2nd line of defense in order to move up the hill and attack the towers. In other words, it meant they couldn't directly attack the towers Guard towers.....if anyone had ever played a Warcraft RTS game then they would know the strength of guard towers. There was a huge bonus applied to the range and attack power of arrows shot by the guard tower. Furthermore, the guards in the tower wouldn't be hurt until the tower collapsed. Thus the guard towers were a necessary resource but it required a lot of resources and people to create. The guard towers and the tactical units with cannons! The shower of arrows and artillery immediately decreased the health of the Nakujuk.

A smirk formed on JusticeMan's face.

“Okay, shall we throw something else at them? Assault units charge!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

They rushed onto the battlefield which split like the Red Sea. The earth sounded like it was shaking as 1,000 mounted troops charged towards the enemy’s camp. This was the concentrated assault of the Baran clan. They were also riding monsters that the trainers had tamed. In fact, JusticeMan had struggled with how to use the monsters in the war. Four or five monsters could only deal with one Nakujuk. And when the battlefield became complicated, the trainer couldn’t handle all the monsters alone. To overcome those drawbacks, JusticeMan had decided to use them as cavalry troops.

The Hellhound, Bolkanasu and Kajel Wolves were ridden into battle. The situation went through a 180 degree change. Thanks to the speed of the rush, the attack damage of the Baran clan and the monsters were greatly improved. It was possible to say that the battle once truly started with this assault. When the assault units appeared, Ark’s eyes brightened and he shouted.

“Huhuhu, it’s time Radun. Transform!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun finally had a chance to play an active role as he ran with Ark on its back towards the assault troops. There was a deafening noise as the assault troops collided with the Nakujuk and the Nakujuk went flying. However, Ark slowed his speed after a quick peek. Ark wasn’t eager to fight and just followed behind the assault units. It was a battle involving thousands spread out through the canyon. While the soldiers were interlocked and fighting, many items also fell. But it was difficult to move easily in such a hectic battlefield. And even Ark was limited in his ability to grab items and store them. But the situation changed when the assault troops broke through the enemy line. Dozens of Nakujuk collapsed from the charge of the assault troops. And an empty space opened between the general Baran troops and the enormous speed of the cavalry unit. The person who picked up the items first was the owner. It was the moment Ark was waiting for! Ark ran after the assault troops and scraped up the items which had fallen to the ground.

“Over there, an item just fell!”

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Ark's eyes looked around and Radun instantly ran to that place when he shouted.

-Radun has acquired the 'Nakujuk's Spear.'

-Radun has acquired the 'Draken's Leather.'

'Hahaha, this is a field of items!'

Ark rode Radun and chased after the cavalry troops. On again, it was like someone else arranging the table with food while Ark picked up the spoon and ate it. He had to do it even if it was shameful. If he didn't do this then how could he raise 45 million won in two months?

"Ark, what are you doing? Is now the time to be playing around?"

At that time, Shambala passed by him and shouted angrily.

"Have you forgotten our mission?"

"I know. I'm looking for it so you don't have to tell me."

Ark answered in a brusque voice while Shambala continued into enemy territory. Yes, Ark was the Commander so he wasn't in the battlefield just to pick up some trivial items. It was due to a special mission.

'Although it is trivial, gathering a lot will still make me some money.'

Ark's sharp eyes looked over the battlefield. At that time, Dedric contacted him through radio from where he had been searching in the sky.

"Beep beep. Chiik, chiik. You hear me, Master.....the goal is found....over."

'Where?'

"Where Master is now.....in that place.....6 o'clock.....50 metres away."

'6 o'clock....okay, I found it!'

Ark searched the camp and discovered the target.

'Oho, the opponent is Jewel? Lucky. Shambala was start complaining about it being unfair.'

Ark looked at Jewel throwing magic all over the place. The most annoying presences in the war were Jewel and the Hermes guild. Thus Ark and Shambala were given a

special mission to handle the Hermes guild. Shambala and Ark were the only ones who could beat them in a melee situation. Ark prioritized this special mission as the most important. The reason was because they had money. The Hermes guild was in a war against NPCs so they were all chaotic. When they died, they would receive 2x the death penalty and would unconditionally drop one item. In other words, they weren't different from a special monster. In addition, they commanded the Nakujuk so they were good prey for Ark.

'Now Jewel looks even prettier. What will I get this time?'

"Radun, to the right. Charge!"

Pa pa pa pa, pa pa pa pa!

Radun quickly rushed towards Jewel.

"Huk, t-that guy....!"

Jewel screamed as she spotted Ark running towards her. In fact, this was not the first time he met Jewel. He had met Jewel two times since the war began. At that time Jewel had rushed frantically towards him. However, the result was a complete defeat for Jewel. Now the pioneer Jewel couldn't match Ark anymore. Jewel was prideful but she finally admitted it after being defeated by Ark twice. The two defeats meant double the penalty and items dropped.

"S-stop him! Don't let him come!"

Jewel fell back and yelled at the Nakujuk. But Ark wasn't going to miss a source of money.

"Hah, trying to run away? Not a chance!"

Ark took out the Saw Blade and threw it. The Saw Blade flew through the air and landed in front of Jewel.

"Undo transformation, Razak Shield Stroke!"

The Saw Blade immediately morphed into Razak at Ark's command. Jewel flinched as Razak immediately struck her with the shield. This was the method Ark developed to hunt the Hermes guild. Ta da da dang, there was a continuous ringing sound as Jewel was pushed back towards Ark. It was the power of intermediate Shield Stroke.

-The proficiency of Razak's Shield Stroke had risen.

Shield Stroke (Intermediate, passive): your ability to handle the shield has become more precise and you can now push the enemy more effectively. You can also use Shield Stroke to strike three enemies at the same time. If all three attacks successfully hits one target then they will be pushed back an enormous distance.

<Interfering with the enemy's attack and attack power +30%, the probability of pushing and causing stiffness increases by 12%, intermediate Shield Stroke can also strike three times>

Ark had studied Shield Stroke during the one week dedicated to hunting. When the new technique was learned, he consumed 50 Affection in order to raise Razak's Shield Stroke.

"Ugh, t-this bastard...!"

Jewel muttered as she stumbled. However, the stiffness meant that Jewel was unable to move.

"Shut up and give me items! Demonic Opening, Dark Blade!"

Ark's enormous attack instantly decreased Jewel's health to 30%. The stiffness was released but Jewel from the strongest Hermes guild didn't dare to fight and just ran away.

"What are you doing? Block him!"

Jewel cried out and the Nakujuk came stampeding towards him. But Ark just smiled and murmured.

"This is all you have? Assault troops, push against them!"

The Baran assault troops heard Ark's shout and pushed against the Nakujuk. But some of the Nakujuk got past and came to help Jewel. At that time, Dedric flew down like a thunderbolt and spat towards the Nakujuk.

"Your opponent is over here you communist!"

He had also consumed 50 Affection points to raise his Taunt skill!

-The skill proficiency of Dedric's Taunt has increased.

Taunt (Intermediate, Active): Taunt can now be used more effectively. The effectiveness of your provocation has increased the range to 20 metres. In addition,

the number of people it can be applied to has increased to 5. The angrier you make your opponent, the longer the duration will last and there will be a wider range of effects.

<It is possible to use within 20 metres. Mana consumption: 30>

“Kuaaak, that bat is spiting on us!”

“Hahaha, it’s not just saliva. It is sputum!”

“Sputum? This freaking bat, I’ll tear it apart!”

“H-hey you morons, where are you going?”

Because they were chaotic, they deliberately put away their best items. It wasn’t possible for them to have a huge effect on the war wearing good items and the damage would be too large if they died. However, it was still more expensive than the items the Nakujuk would drop and it relieved his stress so he continued hunting the Hermes guild.

“Jewel’s equipment is more expensive than that other guy. Wasn’t the armour I got from that warrior only worth 100,000 won? These fellows are like beggars.”

Ark clicked his tongue and looked around again.

“Anyway, I’ve caught more than Shambala at the moment.”

Although he was hunting the Hermes guild, they weren’t the only targets. The chieftains were often hidden in the back or buried in a group of Nakujuk.

‘Shall I see how many Nakujuk I can kill while hunting their chieftains?’

“Dedric, use satellite mode!”

“Sheesh, don’t call it that name. It is surveillance mode!”

Dedric grunted and flew into the sky again. And soon they found another commander not far from there. Naturally a special monster would drop better items than a normal monster. Instead of killing the chickens, Ark wandered around and sliced up the Hermes leaders. Of course, it was determination for a jackpot but Ark’s achievements also contributed greatly to the military situation.

“Ohhh, Ark-nim has already defeated another leader!”

“Those guys aren’t a big deal!”

Thanks to Ark, the morale of the Baran clan went up while the Nakujuk’s decreased. Meanwhile, Shambala had finished hunting the Hermes guild and changed targets to the chieftains as well. The Drakens were completely destroyed and the Hermes members and chieftains were collapsing one after the other. After approximately 2 hours had passed.....

“Eeeugh, retreat, everybody retreat!”

The Nakujuk fled after suffering enormous damage.

Act 5: Special Attack Corps

“Reinforcements?”

Raiden asked with a frown.

“Didn’t you tell me a few days ago that the Nakujuk would be sufficient?”

“T-that is.....”

Jewel stuttered an excuse on the other side of the handset. Well it was actually an excuse that he heard several times so far. Thanks to Ark, the rehabilitation group and the Dark Brothers, the Nakujuk’s conquest of the Netherworld had unexpectedly been halted. However, Jewel had refused Raiden’s support after they gained consecutive victories in the first few battles. That’s because Jewel would receive less shares of the Netherworld if she accepted Raiden’s help. But the situation had changed and the battles had become increasingly difficult. In addition, they didn’t have an extra Letter Movement Orb so they couldn’t accept reinforcements from the Nakujuk for the moment. But was that all? Every time Jewel, Duke and the Hermes guild participated in the battles, the situation became messy because they were smashed by Ark and Shambala.

“So now you need my help with these issues.”

“We’re really sorry.”

Jewel replied in a weak voice, making Raiden sigh.

“Okay, we can’t afford to have our forces currently leave Silvana. I’ll hire a few people from the mercenary guild and send them to you. But it’ll take them some time to go through the red wilderness. Can you hold out until then?”

“It is difficult to advance but they don’t have enough to take us all out.”

“Then be patient.”

Raiden hung up and immediately connected to New World. Then he used the gold reserves to hire mercenaries. He hired approximately 1,000 mercenaries which would be enough to change the situation in the Netherworld.

‘This is serious!’

At that time, there were eyes watching them leave for the Netherworld. It was the foreign business manager of the Silvana trading post, Sid. Raiden had secretly hired and gathered the mercenaries but there was no large transfer of funds in Silvana that could escape Sid’s eyes. Ark had already guessed that Jewel would ask for help and assigned Sid to watch Raiden. And he passed this information straight to Ark.

“Wah ah ah!”

“We managed to defeat those guys and retook Kurata canyon.”

“Commander JusticeMan, hooray!”

It had been a week since the Nakujuk war started.....

In the meantime, they had fought five times in the canyon and the momentum seemed to be with the Baran as they drove the Nakujuk back. In addition to Ark and Shambala, the popularity of JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members also increased.

“As expected, our decision to entrust this to you was completely correct.”

The elders had completely become Ark’s followers. He disapproved of the sudden change in the elder’s attitude but who was he to complain about a good thing.

“.....The victory in this battle is huge. Our approximate line of defense has been completed.”

JusticeMan spoke with a satisfied expression as he looked at the map. Thanks to the victory just now, they could build ten guard towers on either side of Kurata

canyon. The Nakujuk had no choice but to advance through Kurata canyon if they wanted to reach Haman Fortress. Of course, this didn't mean that the guard towers was absolute. If there weren't any soldiers stationed there then it would just be a normal building. But when the battle spread into the canyon then it'll show its powerful function and would improve the percentage of victory. In addition, the monitoring range would increase by a huge amount if they used the guard towers. They would be able to watch every move of the Nakujuk in the canyon.

"With Haman Fortress's extension, they won't dare attack it anymore. In addition, the supplies they gathered in the south east is already running out. With the guard towers blocking the movements of the Draken, they'll probably won't be able to hold out and will retreat to the valley village."

"Now we've overcome our inferior power and stabilized the region."

Shambala also nodded. Ark's party was now completely immersed in the Netherworld war. There wasn't that many opportunities to experience a massive war like this in the game. It was a matter of life or death for NPCs but it was just a game for users. They were able to experience a hot battle so they were enjoying it. In particular, JusticeMan and Shambala's motivation had increased by a considerable amount. It was a 180 degree change from the siege or battles they previously participated in. The siege was just a war. But this war had some justification. JusticeMan was helping the residents so he considered it a good cause while Shambala was looking after his precious girlfriend (?). Fulfilling Isabel's wish was his justification!

They faced this war with a different type of determination. Moreover, the opponents were monster-type NPCs. Unlike the siege where it was just a competition between users, this war would give fame, experience and items. In addition, the war gave additional experience to users with a title. The experience of JusticeMan and Lariette who were the deputies, the rehabilitation members who were the commanding officers of their units and even Buksil who was in charge of supplies went up dramatically. However, the one who ate up the most experience was obviously Ark who was the Commander. As the commander of the Baran clan, he received a certain amount of experience every time a Nakujuk was killed. Thanks to that, Ark climbed 16 levels in a week and finally reached level 300.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +400	
Fame	10, 725 (+500)	Level	300

Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson’s Hero, Great Adventurer	
Health	4,710 (+150)	Mana	4,700
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	593 (+28)
Agility	753 (+55)	Stamina	893 (+20)
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	912
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	119
Art of Communication	66	Affection	31 (+10)
Resilience	358		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
* <King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior’s Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Wind Spirit’s Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, ‘Slide’ available			
Galgashi’s Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, ‘Magic Protection’ automatically activates.			
Adelaine’s Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, ‘Blessing of the Sea’ available			

Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%

Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

His fame also went up considerably as the Commander. The average level of the rehabilitation members reached 220 while Lariette also became level 200. They received less experience than Ark but they were lower levelled so their speed was still fast.

'Levelling up like this isn't good. My experience gain will start slowing down.'

Ark was unexpectedly complaining. As expected, it was gold and money that made Ark happy instead of levels. Currently the percentage of Baran who've received the raccoons' weapons was 80%. 1,000 was necessary but only 800 had been completed and passed through Ark's hands. Thanks to that, Ark managed to receive ores equivalent to 1,600 gold. Of course, he made it into weapons and sold it in his store as cash.

'The merchandise trade it huge!'

Ark was impressed by how much he gained from trading merchandise. He didn't have to lift a finger in order to gain 1,600 gold. If he could monopolize dealings bigger than this, the profit would be unimaginable.

'If I can monopolize the Netherworld after it rises, as well as Silvana and Lancel village then hunting for money won't be a problem!'

Anyway, the people who were always ahead were the ones who grasped an opportunity. Ark was able to envision a more realistic aspiration thanks to his business. Ark had also picked up a significant amount of loot on the battlefield. Buksil had already moved the japtem to the displays in Ark's Comprehensive Store. But even if all of it was sold, he was only be able to receive 300~400 gold at the most. The best items were the ones obtained from the Hermes guild. Even if it wasn't their original items, it was still high levelled magic items. On auction sites he would be able to receive an average of 30~50 for it. So far he had secured 20 items from the Hermes guild which meant 600~1000 gold.

'Kukukuk, being chaotic at that level.....stupid guys.'

After calculating, he earned approximately 3,000 gold in one week! That was around 30 million won earned.

'I've only just signed the lease contract and I've already earned 3,000 gold in a fortnight. It's a lot and there's still slightly less than 2 months left. If I keep this up then the rental amount won't be a problem!'

Ark really felt like he was flying. But no matter how much he liked it, he couldn't drag the war on forever.

'The movement of the Hermes Alliance is serious.'

Ark had received information from Sid that the Hermes guild had hired mercenaries. But there was no news of a siege beginning at Silvana.

'They are clearly bound for the Netherworld. They're sending in reinforcements.'

Currently the Netherworld war was 6:4, with the Baran being slightly superior. But there was no guarantee that the situation couldn't reverse. If the Nakujuk headquarters managed to produce a Letter Movement Orb in time then more reinforcements could come at any time. If there were joined by the Hermes mercenaries then the situation would spiral out of control. The canyon had 10 guard towers, but RTS games have proved there was a limitation when there were too many people. The side with a lot of numbers would win. Although bombs could be used in reality, the rule of numbers was absolute in medieval battles where people fought with swords and shields.

"What do we do now?"

Shambala asked in a worried voice after hearing all of the circumstances.

"This war couldn't be won anyway. I knew that from the beginning."

"What? What are you saying.....?"

"Me? I told you so from the beginning. Even if the Baran win here, it isn't possible to capture the Nakujuk's headquarters. Eventually the war will continue and they won't be able to win."

"If you knew that then why did you drag us into the war?"

Shambala stood up and glared at Ark. This guy, he was so immersed in the war that he forgot the true purpose. Ark looked at Shambala with pity in his eyes before speaking.

"It's not finished, now's the time to start the main point."

"Main point?"

"Hah, do I have to explain it again from the beginning? Shambala, what is your purpose for coming here?"

"Purpose.....occupy a place here.....when the Netherworld rises....."

"That's it."

Ark said with a smile.

"Did you forget? Our purpose is not to win the Netherworld war. Our goal is strictly to elevate the Netherworld to middle earth."

"Wait a minute. What will happen to the Baran clan when the Netherworld rises to middle earth?"

Larriette's question also wasn't difficult to answer. Shambala also nodded and added.

"That's right. The Nakujuk will still attempt to conquer the Netherworld even if it rises."

Sometimes it was tiring talking to a person who wasn't as clever. He was nice and handsome so couldn't he solve such problems without Ark telling him? Ark shook his finger and spoke.

“Think about it. What will be one of the most significant changes if the Netherworld rises to middle earth?”

“The biggest changes.....?”

“The biggest change will happen to the Netherworld. Like Isabel said, the first change will be the visit from the Three Kingdoms and the second change is that users will descend on the Netherworld.

“Well I guess.”

“Won’t users show interest in the Netherworld’s quests?”

That was the solution that Ark thought of for the Netherworld. A huge number of users will surge to the Netherworld with no information. And the first thing they’ll see will be the Baran suffering from the Nakujuk’s invasion. When ordinary users saw it, they would think that the Baran clan were the good NPCs. On the other hand, the Nakujuk would be labelled as monsters. That is, the users’ enemy. He didn’t know how Jewel’s group allied with the Nakujuk, but ordinary users would feel obligated to help the NPCs and defeat the Nakujuk.

“If the Baran elders commission the users then the Nakujuk would be annihilated.”

It was just like a huge defense league had come to the Netherworld. So naive users would apply for the militia. If the Hermes guild sent reinforcements then their numbers would be nothing compared to the number of Baran. In addition, users couldn’t permanently die. So it would be possible to recycle the troops again and again. The Nakujuk wouldn’t be able to survive against that.

“If the users assist the Baran clan then the Hermes Alliance won’t be able to move excessively.”

If the Netherworld rose and the Nakujuk still tried to conquer it, wouldn’t the user help the NPCs against the monsters? If that happened, the users would publicly forsake the Hermes Alliance if they saw them allied with the monsters.

“That’s why I said we don’t need to win this war to win. If users appear then the elders can ask them to subdue the Nakujuk.”

“.....And they’ll do all the work.”

Shambala shook his head with a tired look. It was a strategy which manipulated users and NPCs. But this was only one part of Ark’s grand plans. The users who came to the Netherworld would form a defensive wall in the war. Of course, this

required a person to supervise them. And JusticeMan, the rehabilitation members and the Dark Brothers were already firmly established with the Baran clan. Naturally, Ark's companions would be authorized to supervise the users. In other words, no matter how many users came to the Netherworld Ark's party would still have exclusive rights to the Baran's territory. If he was smart then there were endless ways to obtain a profit.

'The Baran clan's economy is still in the Bronze Age. But that will change once users start arriving. If the capital of the Dark Brothers is used to establish an economic system beforehand then I can also benefit from it.'

Even though they stopped the assassinations, the funding of the Dark Brothers couldn't be ignored. Nabein wanted to rebel in the past before he didn't want to lose his source of profit. If the Baran used that to build an economic system, he would gain huge profits as the Netherworld continued to evolve.

'Huhuhu, I'll be able to achieve all the plans in my head if I have the funding of the Dark Brothers. Naturally a large amount of soybean powder will fall in my direction.'

When Ark first entered the Netherworld, he thought he would be able to profit if he monopolized the quests and dungeons. However, this wasn't such a trivial amount. Ark recalled the various business plans he thought of while exploring the valley village. Guided tours of the Netherworld on the skyways, tamed monster safari and even created a new currency system for a fee..... It wasn't just for users in the Netherworld, it could also be applied to trading with the Three Kingdoms. Ark was going to invest the Dark Brothers huge capital into all those businesses.

In fact, it was also necessary for the Dark Brothers. They would have the power to negotiate with the Three Kingdoms when the Netherworld appeared. If Ark used the Dark Brothers capital to initiate some projects then they would make the capital back and he would profit, And Isabel had already agreed and signed a contract before they entered the Netherworld. Yes, the eligibility to participate in Netherworld businesses. That was the reward for Ark's information he mentioned to Shambala and Isabel.

"Bah, you had such ulterior motives."

Shambala now realised that the conditions Ark presented weren't as simple as he thought. However Ark just ignored him.

"What are you talking about? I've been thinking of the Dark Brothers."

Ark paid no attention to Shambala's glare and continued.

"Well, well! Let's focus. Anyway, the important thing is to maintain the defense line until the Netherworld rises.

"Although you said it early, but I can't easily imagine it. The Netherworld will really rise to middle earth?"

"That is correct."

Ark had emphasized the word 'we.' Because Ark needed to complete the quest but the purpose for reviving the world was for 'them.'

"Then it would've been better to revive the world tree instantly."

Shambala spoke in a strange voice. Then why didn't he revive the world tree as soon as he came to the Netherworld?

It was a question with plenty of answers. But there were three reasons why Ark hadn't done it. First, if the Dark Brothers hadn't established themselves by the time that the Netherworld rose then Ark's profits would decrease. Secondly, reviving the world tree required a number of special conditions.

"The world tree is an existence which maintains the balance of the world. It gets its source of power from the Netherworld. There has to be a full moon in the Netherworld when trying to resurrect the world tree. The increase in power will increase the probability of success."

"Right. Isn't tomorrow a full moon?"

"Okay, that's why I mentioned that we needed to hold on for one week once the war started. That's the reason why I didn't want to push too hard against the Nakujuk. If they felt the crisis then Jewel might've called in reinforcements from the Hermes guild earlier. Understood? And one last thing....."

Ark pointed towards a section of the map rolled out on the table.

"This is the location of the world tree."

Ark had pointed beyond the northern mountains where the headquarters of the Nakujuk was located.

"Yggdrasil told me that the world tree was worshipped by the Myutal. So naturally the Baran built a castle around it. The Baran were driven from that place and now the Nakujuk occupies it. Therefore, I have no choice but to lead the troops there to

resurrect the world tree. But realistically it is impossible. And the Hermes Alliance has already sent the mercenaries so there is no time."

"The Nakujuk headquarters.....then?"

"There is only one way left."

Ark traced the path between Haman Fortress and the world tree with his fingers.

"I have to sneak into enemy territory with a small force and revive the world tree."

"You're going to organize a special attack corps?"

"That's right, we'll use the skyrays to fly past the northern mountains. Furthermore, the Nakujuk will be busy thinking about the war in the south. It would be difficult with a large number but I might be able to infiltrate with a small group. And I'll have to do whatever it takes to break through the enemy lines and revive the world tree."

"So this is the final and most important mission."

JusticeMan nodded with a convinced look. Since the time in New World will triple the rate of reality, a full moon actually appeared every 15 days in reality. If they missed the opportunity tomorrow then they would have to wait another 15 days. But the Hermes mercenaries would arrive in a few days so there was only one chance.

"There's no choice."

Shambala murmured and turned to look at Ark.

"Of course, I'll have to attend?"

"Naturally. The destination is the enemy's stronghold. The odds aren't in my favour if I go with a large force. We can hit and run with a small number of people. Thus I need a small and elite force that can move quickly. And as much as I hate to admit it, you are a strong ally."

"Then I'll go."

"Me too, there's no way I'll miss this."

The rehabilitation members immediately raised their hands when the strategy was decided. But like he said, it was better to have a small number for this operation. If they wanted to sneak in undetected then it required a maximum of 10 people. And

Ark had already picked the people he wanted to infiltrate with in his head. Aside from the reliable Shambala, the one he needed most was Lariette with her recovery magic. JusticeMan was also a reliable person. However, reviving the world tree meant nothing if the fortress was taken so JusticeMan needed to remain at the fortress. He instead decided to choose the members with the highest levels which were Bul-kkun, Ddeok-dae, Jjak-tung, Yapsab, Hae Gyeol-sa, and Tazza. The level was necessary but they also needed to be able to work together. 10 of the Baran clan warriors also wanted to accompany them but that would be detrimental to his plan of sneaking in. Therefore, the Baran warriors were given the role of guiding them through the northern mountains. In the end, the ones who would sneak through the enemy's camp to revive the world tree were 9 people.

'This is the only chance!'

Ark began to prepare for the expedition and checked his equipment.

"The fate of the Netherworld rests on your shoulders."

JusticeMan said firmly as he handed the rehabilitation members the 'Slime's Immortality Pill.' During their spare time in the Netherworld, JusticeMan had created the Slime's Immortality Pills but he hadn't decided who should eat them first. But thanks to this situation, the privilege was given to the 6 people in the special attack corps.

"Oh, isn't this thing awesome? My abilities have gone up!"

Bul-kkun's mouth gaped open as he saw the effect of the Slime's Immortality Pill. The remaining 4 people also reacted the same way. The special attack corps finished the preparations and climbed aboard the skyrays, with JusticeMan saying one final thing.

"The northern mountains have a lot of Drakens that the Nakujuk use to patrol. It's not going to be an easy path. So in order to avoid the Nakujuk's attention, you'll go around the canyon to enter the northern mountains."

".....I understand."

"Good luck."

The special attack corps saluted and flew into the sky. Then JusticeMan stepped back and turned around. The thousands of Baran gathered in the fortress square lifted their arms and cheered.

"Wah ah ah!"

“Commander Ark-nim, we wish you the best of luck.”

Roaaaaar!

The sharp gust of wind blasted against their skin. The pressure felt like a huge beast was attacking them.

“Lower your upper body and lean forward. It’s the end if you get caught in the gust!”

Ark shouted as the skyray were pummelled by the wind. They had to avoid the eyes of the Nakujuk so Ark’s group made a detour around the Golgi mountains after departing from the fortress and finally arrived in the Valley of Fangs in the afternoon. In order to cross the northern mountains, passing through the valley of fangs which connected the northern and southern parts of the mountains wasn’t a popular path. It intricately crossed the northern mountains like a maze. And just like the ‘Abyss of Despair,’ the Nakujuk’s garrison was situation in the middle. It would be unreasonable to break through that garrison on the skyrays. In addition, they might inform the headquarters even if Ark managed to break through which would make things more difficult. That’s why he had the Baran warriors accompany him in order to guide him.

“Fang Valley has a secret passage that the Nakujuk don’t know about. It is a very, very dangerous place but you’ll be able to go undetected by the Nakujuk.

The Baran warriors said it was a secret passage located in a deep cave in Fang Valley. It was situated in the middle of sky-high cliffs so they wouldn’t have been able to enter without the skyrays. And as soon as they passed through the cave, they would arrive at Ageiron the current headquarters of the Nakujuk and former castle of the Baran.

“Okay, let’s do it.”

Ark directed the skyrays towards the cave and a message window popped up when he entered.

-A lava cave hidden in Fang Valley.

You have found the lava cave hidden inside the maze-like Fang Valley.

The Baran clan used this cave to escape when they were driven from the north a long time ago. But after a long time, the cave has taken a different form thanks to the lava flowing through it. And the faint cries of beasts could be heard from along the cave

walls. It seems to be a very unsafe passage.

<Explorer's Knowledge: Hidden dungeon bonus (Skill Points: 10)>

"Eh? It's different from the stories?"

The Baran warriors looked around puzzled at the maze like cave complex. The information window stated that the lava had been flowing for 100 years so the shape of the cave would've changed a lot. Moreover, even the Baran warriors had never seen the cave. All they had were loose sheets of maps that their ancestors drew when they escaped from the north a long time ago. Thanks to that, the group spent a large amount of time wandering the cave. In addition, there were sharp fangs of rocks jutting out from all over the cave walls. It wasn't easy to fly through the cave while avoiding those rocks.

"But the most irritating thing is this heat....."

In fact, Ark was extremely tired from the choking heat. The cave the Baran warriors were guiding them through had lava running like a river on the ground. The gusts of winds also blew hot air like a hair dryer. It was to the extent that his skin became hot and sore after being hit by the wind. Ark wiped off his sweat and the information window once again updated.

-Due to the extreme heat, your fatigue has risen by 10%!

<For every 10% your fatigue rises, all stats, attack speed and movement speed will decrease by 5% and the amount of satiety when consuming food will decrease by 5%. If your fatigue goes above 50% then you will lose 10 health every 50 seconds. In addition, if your fatigue reaches 100% then you will lose all your health and die.

Relaxing away from the extreme heat or eating cold food can lower fatigue>

That was the information window that appeared shortly after entering the cave. It was an opposite effect to the 'cold' that Ark experienced when he first entered the Netherworld. Fortunately, it was easier to recover from than the cold effect. Fatigue could be lowered simply by resting in a place away from the heat. However, the cave was filled with sharp rocks on all sides. Even lava was flowing on the floor. It wasn't possible to find a place to rest. Thanks to that, Ark's fatigue had already increased to 40%.

"Damn, if it wasn't for these rocks....."

If they were speared by the sharp rocks then they would be roasted like grilled skewers. No, even without the rocks it would just be like they were roasting in an oven.

“Ah, this place is indicated on the map. Fortunately it doesn’t seem to have changed that much!”

“We’re almost there now. Have strength!”

Ark’s companions gasped with exhaustion while the Baran cheered them on.

‘Damn, it’s easy for them to say.’

In fact, the Myutal didn’t feel heat or cold. The climate in the Netherworld always changed on a whim so they’ve adapted to those type of environments. Therefore the Baran’s cheers only seemed like someone was clawing at Ark’s thighs. But the real problem started now.

‘If I eat Patbingsu (shaved ice) then I’ll feel better....but there is no place to land.....’

Ark gasped while looking around. Then he suddenly saw a dark shape approaching rapidly from inside the cave. Ark stared at the dark shape blankly before suddenly shouting.

“D-Draken?”

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

Ark’s shout echoed along with the Draken’s roar through the cave. The warrior leading the party shouted with a perplexed expression.

“Huk, w-wild Draken!”

There were ten Drakens approaching them from the front.

“Damn, my breath is already choked up just from flying.....battle formation!”

Ark, Shambala, the rehabilitation members, Lariette and the Baran warriors lined up in their formation. It was one which protected Lariette in the middle with her recovery magic while still allowing them to fight. Ark took out his sword and asked the Baran warriors.

“How far is the exit?”

"Not far according to the map. It's in approximately 1 kilometres. The Draken are settled here so they probably won't chase us if we managed to get out through the exit."

"Okay, Shambhala let's just rush and penetrate through them. Dark Blade!"

"Okay, Meteor Strike!"

Shambala and Ark rushed forward like an arrow and swung their swords. Tazza and Jjak-tung attacked the Drakens from the rear with their cannons. However, they only managed to push back a few Drakens before they were surrounded by the rest.

"Dammit, our attack power is weakened."

Ark swore as he turned around to avoid the Draken's counterattack. Normally those attacks would've penetrated through the Draken. However, Ark's group had accumulated fatigue thanks to the heat so they weren't in a condition to exert their full power. It wasn't simply a matter of the stats or damage decreasing. Every breath he took while swinging his sword sounded clogged like a man stuck in a sauna. That wasn't the only problem.

"Ugh, I can't aim properly!"

"I can't fight and control the skyray....."

Unlike Ark, Shambala and the rehabilitation members had no experience with combat on skyrays. It was taking everything they had just to calm the skyrays who were frightened by the Drakens' attacks. It wasn't possible to aim a cannon or bow while the skyray was running wild. In addition, the wild Drakens had higher levels and damage than Ark's group.

"Heok, aaaaaak-!"

Eventually, two of the Baran fell into the lava thanks to the Drakens' attacks. And another Baran warrior was caught by a Draken and died. The Baran warriors had their morale fall after seeing such horrible scenes.

"It's impossible to fight against a bunch of Drakens. We have to get the hell out of here!"

"It can't be helped. Shambala and hyung-nims, please gather the Draken in one place!"

Ark shouted and took a sword out of his bag.

“U-understood. Hik!”

The rehabilitation members avoided the attacks of the Drakens and flew all over the place. Soon the ten Draken were lined up. At that moment, Ark dropped his sword from above them and made it explode.

“Blade Storm!”

Kwakwakwakwa, kwakwakwakwa!

The devastating storm of sword fragments swirled with an intense glare! The Draken was pressed by the huge pressure of the storm and fell. He thought they might fall in the lava but the Drakens soon regained their balance and flew up again. However, it was possible to block the movements of the Drakens for a while thanks to Blade Storm.

“Now’s the time! Guide, you take the lead. Let’s break through to the exit!”

The Baran warriors and Ark’s group traversed the cave at a tremendous pace.

Kurwarwarwarwa-!

The Drakens’ cries of fury quickly came from behind them. Their eerie cries felt like the Draken’s were breathing on the back of his neck. But there was no room to look back. Ark’s group leaned forward on the back of the skyrays like they were riding motorcycles and raced through the cave. Then they clumsily drifted around a corner.

“We’ll arrive soon! All that’s left is the exit in front of us.....huk!”

The Baran warriors turned the corner and screamed before suddenly braking. They stared in front of them with desperate looks and moans.

“Ugh, unbelievable.....!”

The exit the warrior mentioned existed. But it wasn’t an exit anymore.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

Large amounts of lava was flowing down from the ceiling like a waterfall in front of the exit. Even with his 75% flames resistance, Ark would still receive huge amounts of damage from one drop of lava. Shambala and the rehabilitation members would only have their bones remaining if the lava fell on them.

“Son of a bitch!”

“Ark, the Drakens!”

He turned his head at Shambala’s warning and saw the Drakens come around the corner. However, now the Drakens weren’t the problem. If they concentrated their energies then it might be possible to deal with the Drakens somehow. But if the exit was blocked then it was meaningless to deal with the Drakens.

‘Soon it will be evening and the moon will rise for 4 hours, I don’t have time to turn around and find another way.’

There wouldn’t be enough time to reach Ageiron if they turned back through the cave to Fang valley. The time limit attached to this operation was until the moon rose. No, before that he would have to get past the Nakujuk’s garrison first.

‘Damn it, I should’ve started the infiltration earlier.....’

Ark avoided the Drakens’ attacks while grinding his teeth together. The only way to enter Ageiron was through this exit.

‘Is there a way to pass through the lava waterfall?’

It was impossible no matter how much he thought about it. He would need a steel umbrella with 1,000% fire resistance.....

At that time, an idea popped into Ark’s head.

‘Wait, umbrella.....? Maybe.....no, there is an umbrella!’

“Shambala!”

Ark immediately approached Shambala and explained the plan. Timing was crucial for the method Ark devised. And the only person who could match his timing was Shambala after fighting together in the Evil Silrion. Shambala’s eyes lit up when Ark explained and he quickly nodded.

“It can be done. Do you have confidence?”

“We have no choice.

“Okay, I’ll believe in you.”

Shambala grabbed the reins and flew up towards the ceiling.

“The rest of you maintain a defensive formation in this area and please endure it!”

"Hik, u-understood. I really dislike aerial combat....."

The rehabilitation members and the warriors started flying around and screaming from the dizziness. Fortunately, one of Lariette's skills was 'Balance of Spirit.' When this skill was used, the person could accurately gauge their position even if they were on a rollercoaster. Thanks to that, they could avoid the attacks of the Drakens. So the Drakens and the Baran warriors engaged in battle, with two of the warriors being sacrificed. They weren't lacking in strength but their priority was to protect the rehabilitation members.

"We do not mind the sacrifice. The entire Baran clan depends on this mission."

It was truly praiseworthy. However, Ark felt even more tense every time he heard a scream. After the fifth Baran warrior had died, Shambala finally called out to him.

-Ark, I'm ready! There's enough room now.

-Okay, now wait for my signal. Don't forget, timing is crucial!

-Don't worry about me and steady yourself.

"Dedric, it's your turn. Lead a Draken near the lava waterfall!"

"Eh, what do I look like in Master's eyes?"

Dedric shouted as he avoided the Draken's snapping fangs.

"You're the only one I can believe in number 2! Razak and Radun aren't any help now."

"Sheesh, I understand. Ya, these lizard. Try to catch me if you can!"

Dedric used Taunt and cursed at the Draken. The Draken flew after Dedric who fled towards the lava waterfall. After a moment the Draken appeared in front of the waterfall!

-Now Shambala!

"Torpedo Sword!"

Shambala used Torpedo Sword while near the ceiling. Then the sharp icicle like rock dropped with a loud sound.

'Now, timing, timing, timing!'

Ark concentrated hard and glared at the falling rock. He had learned how to grasp the timing of moving objects in taekwondo. Ark calculated the timing in his head and rushed at full speed towards the rock. The moment he collided with the rock, Ark connect Parry and Counter attack to use Riposte.

Kkakakakaka, daeng dong!

The rock bounced off him like an arrow. It was the reason Ark rushed forward and used Riposte. If he used all his momentum to push the heavy falling rock with Riposte, it would shoot off in the opposite direction like an arrow. Of course, the force of the impact wasn't small but Ark had concentrated and stared at the rock. The goal of the flying rock was the Draken chasing after Dedric!

Snap, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The rock penetrated the Draken's chest and lodged it in the wall. The Draken was like an insect specimen nailed to the top of the lava waterfall! The lava fell onto the Draken and split in half like it was an umbrella. And the exit was clearly exposed. The Draken started struggling as it took a shower in the lava waterfall. However, the rock was firmly lodged in the wall and wouldn't budge. So, that was Ark's plan.

"It's a success, now quickly go through the exit!"

"Oh, exit!"

The rehabilitation group and the Baran warriors turned away from the Drakens and charged in Ark's direction. Ark, Shambala and Lariette had already passed through the exit. Meanwhile, the Drakens health was quickly disappearing. Its skin had started to melt from the intense heat. Even the Drakens who lived in the lava cave couldn't withstand the heat of the lava.

"Hurry. It won't last for much longer!"

"Ah, understood!"

The rehabilitation members stopped aiming the cannons and arrows at the Drakens and went through the exit. At that moment, the sound of the Draken's skeleton was heard as it floated away in the lava waterfall. The lava waterfall was also starting to block the increasingly narrow exit. Hae Gyeol-sa had just came in that direction and cursed.

"Dammit!"

“Hae Gyeol-sa hyung!”

“Damn! It’s not possible.....I’ll have to stay here..... Don’t worry about me and just go..... The Baran warriors and I.....we’ll return to Haman Fortress.”

“We’re sorry.....we believe in Commander.”

The sound of Hae Gyeol-sa and the warriors’ voices became lost thanks to the loud waterfall. But they were already surrounded by a bunch of Drakens. It was impossible for them to exit the lava cave and return to Haman Fortress.

“It can’t be helped. They were too slow. Let’s just think like that.”

Jjak-tung said after shaking his head and patting Ark’s shoulders. There was no way for them to go back and help Hae Gyeol-sa and the Baran warriors anyway. Ark looked at the lava waterfall for a brief moment before nodding and turning away. This was Ark’s infiltration mission where the destiny of the Dark Brothers and the Netherworld was at stake, it wasn’t possible to stop and worry about the people who had fallen behind.

Act 6: Ageiron

Ageiron.

A large city spread in front of you after escaping the lava cave. This is the ancient city in the Netherworld where the Baran used to flourish, Ageiron. The nature and peace loving Baran clan built the beautiful city around the world tree Yuzuria. But now it was ruled by the Nakujuk and the old beauty of Ageiron couldn’t be found anymore. The whole city is covered rusted steel and grey rocks. The world tree Yuzuria stands in the heart of the city while letting out a dismal atmosphere.

<Explorer’s Knowledge: Hidden city discovery bonus (Skill Points: 20)>

‘We finally arrived.’

Ark looked at the distant city. The lava cave was like a tunnel piercing straight through the northern mountains. After going through the exit with much difficulty, they had managed to immediately move to the opposite side of the northern mountains. Luckily the Nakujuk hadn’t occupied every part of the north. After moving through the northern mountains, they had managed to find Ageiron which was their destination. As Ark’s group starting moving north, he noticed something

strange. Beseutyu had said the northern forests were a lush, beautiful place. But the north was actually more barren than the south. Almost everywhere was a desert covered with coarse sand with occasional dry woods appearing.

‘Is this the influence of the world tree?’

Ark recalled what Bona had deciphered from the scroll. The scroll stated that the Netherworld was initially an abundant place, regardless of north or south. When the world tree became deprived of its power, the south which was the furthest away from it started to become barren. This was the reason why the Nakujuk swarmed to the north and occupied Ageiron. However, the world tree had been deprived of its power for 100 years. In addition, the Nakujuk indiscriminately killed the forests in order to build their garrisons and the north became devastated. On the other hand, the Baran’s enthusiasm for nature changed the south into a better environment.

‘Is the situation reversing the reason why the Nakujuk want to conquer to south again?’

This was a scene which clearly showed the importance of protecting the environment. Even though he now knew all the Nakujuk’s reasons, he still resented them. Anyway, Ageiron was a larger city than he thought. It was like a medieval castle with several layers of walls spread out in a circular form, with various buildings in the region between the walls. And the heart of the city was the towering world tree Yuzuria which stretched out to touch the sky. Of course it had changed to a dead twisted tree with shrivelled branches.

‘We have to cross the city in order to revive Yuzuria?’

The group naturally sighed as they saw the vast number of Nakujuk teeming in Ageiron. Currently they only had 8 people who were Ark, Shambala, Lariette, Bulkkun, Ddeok-dae, Jjak-tung, Tazza and Yapsab. But Ark’s purpose was to restore Yuzuria so there was no reason to fight every Nakujuk in Ageiron. He had to stay undetected by the enemy until he reached Yuzuria. It wouldn’t be easy if they were users like Jewel but the opponents were NPCs. It was like an old gaming style popular with users ‘Jikbo (a method of controlling the game but not fighting against monsters and only going up against bosses)’ where using the appropriate skills would increase the odds in their favour.

‘That’s why I picked a variety of professions.’

“Everybody please eat this for the moment.”

While taking a break, Ark created many types of cuisine and arranged them like a buffet. They were deluxe dishes generously made with a lot of ingredients.

“Oh, it is good to travel with you during moments like these.”

The group were tired from the lava cave and quickly scraped clean the buffet. In the meantime, Ark collected the group's equipment and repaired it. It was truly a service which bled him! But in this situation he had to do everything possible to raise the strength of the party. Lariette's buffs also raised the stats of the group considerably.

“List of secondary effects.”

-Information window of secondary effects applied.

* Food effects

【 Energy Drink 】 【 Tuntun Roast 】 【 Sweet and Sour Past 】 【 Herb Salad 】
【 Shrimp Tempura 】

<Total stats raised by the food effects: Strength +45, Stamina +24, Agility +30, Intelligence +5>

* Buff effects

【 Storm Breathing (Attack Speed + 10%) duration: 30 minutes 】

【 Warrior's Concentration (Critical Hit Chance + 20%) duration: 30 minutes 】

【 Hero's Spirit (Attack power + 10%) duration: 1 hour 】

* Special skills effect

【 Blade Maintenance (Sword Attack +3%) duration: 1 hour 】

【 Intermediate Laundry (Defense + 7%) duration: 4 hours 】

【 If the Innocence Knight becomes the leader than the party's defense and attack will rise by 7% 】

* Effects of Tonic currently taking

【 Sipjeondaebotang (TL: type of Korean herbal soup) (Strength +1, Stamina +1) duration: 18th day 】

Reading the combined effects really was amazing. Currently Ark's Survival Cooking dishes could be compared to the effects of the finest cuisine. But with every good thing, there was always a downside. If there weren't any repeat dishes, it was possible to eat 10 different types of food. It was also subjected to one

limitation. Satiety. If satiety reached 100% then they couldn't eat any more dishes. Even if the duration of a dish ran up, if his satiety was full than he wouldn't be able to eat another type. Therefore he couldn't cook excessively and his ingredients piled up.

This was the main disadvantage of Survival Cooking. The effect of the dishes on stats was better. But the increased effects also increased the amount of satiety. Quite a few dishes had their satiety over 30%. Thanks to that, only 3~5 of the finest quality dishes could be eaten at the same time.

'While the satiety and effects are highly effective, some of the ingredients are quite difficult to obtain.'

Ark looked at the few precious ingredients he had left and clicked his tongue.

'These dishes are worth at least 2 gold.....'

In this situation Ark had no time to worry about the expense of the meal. Anyway, thanks to his cooking the stats of the special attack corps rose by a large amount. But was that all? Using 'Blade Maintenance' and intermediate Laundry also increased his attack and defense. Just like a thief, Ark learned special skills which put his buffs on a level similar to Lariette's. Shambala checked the secondary effects window and murmured in an astounded voice.

"What on earth? It's the first time I've seen such a jumbled up character like you."

"I also wonder about my identity."

Ark replied with a grin. Once he finished the corps' maintenance, they descended the hill and approached Ageiron. They had left the skyrays while approaching. If they approached Ageiron on the skyrays then it would instantly be a beehive. From here onwards it was infiltration time. They paid attention and hid when necessary.

"The question is how to reach the world tree undetected....."

Shambala looked at Ageiron with a frustrated expression. Ageiron was the headquarters of the Nakujuk. Just like bacteria proliferating, there were a huge number of Nakujuk. Although they were residents of the city, 70% of them consisted of warriors. The sky was already turning dark and the edges of the full moon could be seen in the sky. While Ark, Shambala and Yapsab who changed his profession to 'Guardian=Scout' could use 'Stealth,' it wasn't something that could be used indefinitely. The duration time was 20 minutes so there was no guarantee that he would be able to remain undetected.

“Huhuhu, it’s time to show our skills.”

The rehabilitation members smiled and approached the front.

“Yapsab, sneak into Ageiron and determine the most common items.”

Yapsab used Stealth to roam Ageiron and then returned to Tazza. Then he roughly drew on the ground and explained.

“It’s the keg. They look like barrels to store wine. They were scattered everywhere.”

“A keg? Good.”

Tazza nodded and took out several pieces of wood and tools from his bag. Then he sawed at the wood and hammered away until he created 8 keg barrels.

“Now everybody please enter the keg.

Ark put on the wine keg and a message instantly appeared.

-The Nakujuk’s wine keg has been reproduced using ‘Clone.’

When using household goods to imitate hostile forces, a ‘camouflage’ effect is applied. Once ‘camouflage’ is applied, you will not be suspicious to hostile forces.

If the opponent shows an interest in you then the ‘risk’ will increase. ‘Risk’ will increase if you show certain suspicious behaviours in certain situations.

<Current risk: 0%>

Tazza had the ‘Counterfeit’ skill that he used in the past. After changing to ‘Guardian=Engineer,’ he managed to learn the ‘Clone’ skill.

“Feng Shui!”

After Jjak-tung said this an information window appeared again.

-The effect of Feng Shui is applied to the party.

Feng Shui is the unique skill of the Guardian=Strategist.’ Using Feng Shui will increase resistance to all environmental and terrain effects. Attacking an enemy from a high place will increase your damage while attacking from a lower place will halve it. In addition, if you hide your body in the darkness then the chances of being

noticed by an enemy will decrease.

<Decrease the probability of the enemy suspecting you by 30%.>

‘The combination of professions is as good as expected.’

Ark once again admired the variety of skills in New World. But Ark also didn’t fall behind when it came to odd skills.

“Now it’s my turn. Dedric, satellite surveillance mode!”

“Okay!”

Dedric floated 100 metres into the air at Ark’s command and looked around.

“In front.....there is a watchtower on the left and right..... One lookout in each tower.....this can’t be ignored..... And there are Nakujuk patrols wandering around the buildings and alleys.....each one 50 metres apart.....moving in a clockwise position.....”

The information that Dedric relayed was displayed as red dots on Ark’s map. This was a new skill Dedric learned during the Nakujuk’s war.

-Your pet Dedric has learned a new skill.

Satellite Surveillance Mode (Beginner, Species Characteristics): You can observe the terrain for 50 metres and the enemy’s movements within a 100 metre area. When the skill proficiency rises, it is possible to scout even further. The information relayed by your summon will also be displayed on the map. However, once activated the skill will consume 5 mana every 10 seconds.

<Information regarding terrain, NPCs and users will be shown on the mini map.>

Thus Dedric was consistently forced to use the satellite surveillance mode. Although Ageiron wasn’t a huge city, it still wasn’t easy to understand the intricate alleys of the city even with the keg’s limited vision. In addition, there was a high probability of the Nakujuk noticed the kegs when they were moving around. They needed to understand the terrain and the enemy’s movements. That was the main purpose of satellite surveillance mode.

“Now let’s sneak into enemy territory.”

The 8 kegs moved towards Ageiron.

Do do do do.....

“Stop! A patrol is approaching the corner.”

Ark whispered in a low voice before entering Ageiron. The special attack corps stopped moving and held their breaths inside the keg. After a few seconds, 10 Nakujuk turned around the corner. They surveyed the area and murmured as they saw the wine barrels.

“Eh? Who placed some wine barrels here?”

“Hmm, I suddenly became thirsty after seeing the kegs.”

-Risk: 20%

‘Hik, t-these bastards! Just go away!’

Ark prayed the Nakujuk wouldn’t look through the hole in the barrel. Luckily one of the Nakujuk slapped his colleague’s shoulder and spoke.

“Hey, do you want to get in trouble for drinking alcohol while on the job? Instead of doing it while on patrol, you can drink when there is a break.”

“Okay, okay. I just wanted to try out the keg.”

The Nakujuk looked at the barrel before turning away. When the patrol officer backed away, the risk level instantly went back down to 0.

‘Phew.....that bastard, if you’re just going to go away then why did you make us terrified for nothing?’

The special attack corps released the breaths they were holding and started moving again.

Do do do do, flinch! Do do do do, stand! Do do do do, slam!

The infiltration using the kegs was smooth. Ageiron had many buildings that seemed like they belonged in large cities. The topography made it easy to avoid the enemy’s eyes. In addition, there were a lot more kegs once they entered the interior so the risk level hadn’t risen. Every time they saw the Nakujuk, they would wait anxiously until the patrol went away.

‘Isn’t it exciting?’

Didn't it feel like they were sneaking around in the action game Metal Gear Solid? Observing the enemy's movements and the terrain using the mini map and then sneaking around was quite exciting. After sneaking through the enemy lines for approximately 20 minutes, the special attack corps arrived at the first gateway. The barrels huddled together near the checkpoint to the next district.

"This area has a lot of watchtowers so it'll be very dangerous."

The most annoying thing while sneaking through enemy territory was the watchtowers. NPCs in the watchtower had an incredibly wide surveillance range and anybody using stealth within that range would have it automatically turned off if the guards looked at them. In fact, as soon as the special attacks corps entered the range of vision the risk level immediately went up to 50%. The guards would definitely notice them if they tried to sneak past. There were also 10 watchtowers in the vicinity of the checkpoint.

"But the watchtowers aren't completely dangerous. If you stick close to the wall while moving then the only risk is another watchtower spotting you. But the watchtowers' line of sight won't overlap in the towers at 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock or 6 o'clock."

"We can't move forward like this so we'll have to handle it."

Shambala said in a low voice.

"Fortunately 3 of the watchtowers are at an appropriate distance. The both of us should take the ones at 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock, while the one at 6 o'clock has a low risk so Yapsab can take care of it."

"You'll have to take care of it while the guards in the other towers are looking in the opposite direction. Do you have confidence?"

"Who are you talking to? You idiot."

They had to defeat the watchtowers in order to infiltrate the city. The only way to disable a watchtower in enemy territory was assassination. Shambala was more of an expert in this field than Ark. Ark laughed and nodded his head.

"Okay, let's get started. Please maintain 'Trill' the whole time. I'll tell you their movements."

Thus 3 kegs approached the watchtowers. They stopped whenever a patrol approached and continued this until the 3 kegs arrived at the place where a ladder to the watchtowers was. Meanwhile Ark surveyed the mini map and calculated the

timing. Because the situation in the watchtowers couldn't be seen from the kegs, they had to solely rely on Dedric's satellite mode.

-Shambala, the lookout has turned his head to the right.

-I saw it. By the way.....it sure is comfortable with your bat. Why don't you give your bat to me?

Shambala teased as he agilely climbed up while the guard was looking away.

-I wouldn't give him for anything.

-Lousy child.

-Let's stop chatting and prepare yourself. Now. None of them are paying attention.

"Radun, poison attack."

Ark jumped out of the keg while using 'Stealth' and muttered. Radun spat out a green liquid onto his sword. At the same time Ark matched Shambala's timing and jumped onto the watchtower. Then he used backstab on the guard looking over the checkpoint.

-You have dealt a critical hit!

<The Nakujuk has been paralyzed by the poison and won't be able to use his muscles for 5 seconds.>

The poisoned guard stiffened and fell to the floor. There was a reason he used the paralysis poison. If the guard screamed for help then it wouldn't be an assassination anymore. Ark followed up with the continuous use of Dark Blade. The guard's health decreased in an instant. But after a while the guard's paralyzed mouth loosened enough for him to call for help. However, Ark continued striking critical hits and making the guard paralyzed. Ark was level 300 and thanks to his dark attribute bonus, he only needed 15 seconds to deal with the Nakujuk. Ark quickly took care of the guard and turned his head, feeling slightly conceited. However, Shambala had already taken care of his lookout.

'Sheesh, that brat.....'

Ark complained with pouted lips. He had grown like crazy in the Netherworld. Now even Jewel and Duke couldn't handle him. Thanks to that, Ark's ego inflated and he had thought there was a considerable difference between him and

Shambala. However, the difference didn't seem that much anymore judging by how fast Shambala took care of the guard.

'Although Shambala is a profession assassin.....'

Nevertheless it didn't feel that pleasant. Then suddenly there was an exclamation mark on the map as a red dot moved. The red dots represented the Nakujuk and the exclamation mark represented a danger. Ark stared with aghast eyes as a Nakujuk arrived at the bottom of Shambala's watchtower.

-Shambala, right below you at 7 o'clock!

At the same time, Shambala's pupils turned in that direction. Then Ark stared with a slack jaw as a dagger suddenly drove through the Nakujuk's mouth.

It was Shambala's 'Dagger Throwing' skill! The Saint Assassin was primarily an assassin profession who could use poisons, daggers and swords. The poisons were even more powerful than the ones produced by Radun! The Nakujuk became stiff and rigid after the dagger hit him. Shambala then jumped off the tower like a gymnast and drove his sword through the top of the Nakujuk's head. The assassination damage was added to the fall damage and a tremendous amount of damage appeared. The Nakujuk was in a 'stunned' state and couldn't even cry out as it died.

'What, what a scary guy....!'

He marvelled at the quick workmanship. It was lucky that he was Ark's ally. He would truly be frightening if they were enemies.

-Let's withdraw quickly.

They hid the bodies in the watchtower and quickly camouflaged themselves again. Ark had confirmed that the watchtowers could see each other. If the other lookouts noticed something unusual then there would be a problem. While Ark and Shambala took care of the front two watchtowers, Yapsab had taken out another lookout and joined them. The rehabilitation members smirked as they spoke to each other.

"Huhuhu, wasn't it easier than you thought?"

"At first I was a little worried but it's not that difficult."

"Don't be careless. If we're discovered before we reach the world tree then it's over."

But honestly, Ark was also feeling a little relaxed. Just like the rehabilitation members said, it was easier than he thought. After becoming more experienced with moving in the kegs, their speed became even faster.

“Wait, someone is approaching.”

Do do do do, flinch, smash!

Once again the 8 kegs froze at Ark’s voice. After waiting a moment, a ten year old Nakujuk boy turned the corner.

‘What the? It was a kid?’

Ark sighed and relaxed. He naturally thought that kids were less dangerous than soldiers. It was a huge mistake. A child was even more curious than adults. And a child was someone whose actions could never be predicted. As expected.....the child suddenly stopped next to the wine barrels and stared.

-Risk: 50%

The risk level had risen to 50% after the boy showed an interest.

‘What, what the? What are you looking at? There’s nobody here. Just go!’

Ark stared at the boy and sent strong thoughts to him. But as expected, the child’s behaviour was impossible to predict. The boy suddenly hooked stabbed his finger through the hole in the barrel. Who the hell would stick a finger in a barrel sitting in the streets? No, there was no time to consider this. It was impossible to imagine that the finger would stab into Ark’s eye, making him give a short scream as he fell down.

“Kuaaak, what, what the?”

“Huk, g-ghost!”

The boy also freaked out and fell on his rear. It was at that time. The Nakujuk patrolling nearby focused their eyes on the kegs as they heard the scream.

-Risk: 100%

<Camouflage and Feng Shui has been released from everyone.>

“O-oh my god....!”

Ark groaned as he looked around with a swollen eye. Shambala rose from the wine barrel and glared at Ark.

“Thank you. You stupid brat!”

“Hey, you try to be quiet when you’re being stabbed in the eye. Of course I would scream! Damn, that child.....!”

Ark’s bloodshot eyes sent a murderous glare towards the boy. Then the boy winced and retreated behind the Nakujuk soldiers.

“Ark-nim, please stop. Despite being a Nakujuk, he is still a child.”

“You idiot, you’re going to take revenge on a child?”

“Ark, let’s act like an adult.....”

Ark turned his head away at Lariette’s, Shambala’s and the rehabilitation members’ words. It didn’t matter if they were an adult or child to Ark. However, there was no time to worry about the kid.

“Damn, let’s get out of here at once!”

Ark led the special attack corps and ran down an alley. The terrified boy suddenly changed his face and laughed.

“Kekeke, intruders. You stupid guys, you’re all dead now. Yes, we’ll tear those guys apart and eat them. In particular that bastard who frightened me, I’ll eat your eyeballs!”

The young boy continued chattering rudely. Thanks to him, the special attack corps was forced to flee. How was this child brought up? He really wanted to see the parents’ faces. No, the parents were chaotic NPCs so wouldn’t they praise him?

“Ark!”

Ark’s useless thoughts stopped after hearing Shambala’s shout. Ark reflexively turned his head around and paled with fear.

“That.....there he is!”

Have you ever been attacked by an enemy in Starcraft? Have you ever received a rush attack by 200 troops? In a situation where there were only eight of you? That was how Ark felt just now.

“Intruders. Kill them!”

“How dare they try to break into Ageiron!”

An enormous number of Nakujuk were emerging from the surrounding buildings. They numbered in the hundreds.....! It was the first time Ark had experienced being surrounded by so many monsters in New World. The square and narrow streets suddenly became filled with Nakujuk. Then the many Nakujuk shot swords, spears and arrows towards the special attack corps.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, seokeok, snap, crunch!

The special attack corps instantly became 8 tattered rags. There was no time for them to stop or even block.

“Healing Touch, Goddess’ Protection!”

Although Lariette used her recovery magic, it was like water just spilling out of a hole.

“Lariette-nim, switch to the set of 3 defensive buffs!”

Raising the damage would be no help in this situation. Enduring was the most important thing. Lariette activated the defensive buffs at Ark’s command and raise their stamina, defense and evasion. Then she used her recovery magic again as the rate they were losing health at slowed down.

“Healing.....aaak!”

Lariette burst out screaming while using her recovery magic. Her healing and buffs made the enemy’s aggro rise. Thus the Nakujuk concentrated their attacks on Lariette. Of course, Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae who changed their profession to ‘Guardian=Assaulter’ used taunt to get the aggro off her. But there were still surrounded by hundreds of Nakujuk. The two of them were unable to protect Lariette from the whole group.

‘Lariette-nim will soon be wiped out!’

Ark threw the Saw blade towards her and shouted.

“Undo transformation. Razak Shield Stroke!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak fell in front of Lariette and swung his shield. The group of Nakujuk was pushed back.

“XX Interception!”

Meanwhile, Ark stabbed his sword at an incredible pace around Lariette. Yes, Ark hadn’t been idle while Dedric and Razak were learning new skills. He learned a new skill thanks to his steady efforts.....that name was XX Interception! This was the technique that had managed to defeat Kaljapeu, and Ark changed to nature of the technique while attacking the Nakujuk and finally managed to learn the skill.

-You have learnt a new skill.

XX Interception (Beginner, Active): a special lunge which concentrates the attacks on a specific area. When using XX Interception on certain monsters, your repeated attacks will increase the target’s fury and change the focus of their anger. This particular area is extremely painful so their attack speed will also be slowed. The pain will reduce their movements.

<When attacking the enemy, there is a 5% chance that the enemy’s movements will be slowed by 5%. Also, every time it succeeds the enemy’s anger will rise like you’ve used Taunt and they will attack you.>

“U-ugh!”

“What, what? This unfamiliar pain.....?”

“Euuugh, it seems to be tearing!”

“Ah.....I didn’t go to the toilet this morning.....”

The Nakujuk screamed when he struck their X spot. The Nakujuk’s bums started swelling when X was hit. The pain the Nakujuk felt every time they tried to move couldn’t be described in words. But that wasn’t the effect Ark aimed for. The Nakujuk felt shame and anger after their X was attacked and they burned with intense hostility towards Ark. It was a ‘forced Taunt!’ Thanks to Ark attacking X, Lariette was able to escape from the crisis.

“.....This lousy bastard!”

“What’s wrong with fighting dirty? Flash!”

Ark passed through the group of Nakujuk and dealt damage to them. However, the situation was still bleak no matter what skill he used. The top right corner of the

mini map was completely filled with colour. The red dots representing the Nakujuk covered the entire map in red. Even if his health managed to endure, they wouldn't be able to defeat all the Nakujuk before the defense buffs ran out.

"Ark, this way!"

Then he heard Shambala's voice from the rear. He saw that Shambala had defeated his group of Nakujuk and was climbing onto the roof. Being attacked on the roof was better than being surrounded by the Nakujuk on all sides. Ark stepped on the wine barrel on the ground and jumped onto the roof. Then he pulled Lariette and the rehabilitation members up. It would be easier to fight on the roof. The terrain reduced the advantage in numbers. But the situation looked even worse thanks to their wider field of view from high up. It wasn't just the alley the special attack corps were in. Thanks to the emergency call, the whole area was strewn with Nakujuk.

'We're screwed, it's all finished now!'

They couldn't run away. If they ran away here then the world tree wouldn't be revived. But it wasn't possible to advance either. There was only on the outskirts of Ageiron so the number of Nakujuk would multiple as they advanced further. The fate of the special attack corps was about to be decided.

"Ark, jump!"

Jjak-tung shouted at that moment. When Ark turned around with a stupid look, Jjak-tung raised his hand and indicated the next gateway.

"There. You might survive if you manage to get there!"

"Huh? But...."

"There's no time to explain. It isn't possible to survive for much longer in this state!"

How the hell would they be able to survive in such a situation? But there was no other way so Ark followed Jjak-tung's words for the moment and ran towards the gateway. They jumped from roof to roof while avoided the arrows until the special attack corps arrived at the next gateway. There were no roofs around the gateway so they jumped off and crossed to the gateway on the ground. But the situation became even worse. Hundreds of Nakujuk had flocked in front of the second gateway.

400, 500, 600, 700.....the number of Nakujuks had grown exponentially.

"Jjak-tung hyung, how the hell....?"

“Run!”

“Huh?”

Jjak-tung, Yapsab and Tazza shouted before turning their bodies around. Ark stared at the scene with astonishment. He could guess Jjak-tung, Yapsab and Tazza’s intentions. They intended to block the advancing enemies using the gateway. However, their professions were strategist, engineer and scout. They wouldn’t even last 30 seconds when surrounded by hundreds of Nakujuk.

Then Jjak-tung smiled and clenched his fist firmly.

“Slime’s Time, NO1!”

Act 7: Gateway Breakthrough!

[**TL Notes:** I had difficulty with the name of Shambala’s technique since they’re only one character in Korean which could have a lot of meanings. Thus I just used the Korean pronunciation for it.]

Jjak-tung’s body was covered with a yellow slime.

‘Slime’s Time!’ Yes, Ark wasn’t the only one with Slime’s Time anymore.

Of course, the skill was created with the Vision scroll so the effects weren’t 100% but the rehabilitation members had also eaten the Slime’s Immortality Pills. It invalidated physical attacks by 100% so it was perfect against the Nakujuks who couldn’t use magic.

“But.....”

Ark looked at Jjak-tung with confusion. Jjak-tung’s intent was perfectly clear. And it was the best way for now. If Jjak-tung died then he would just lose some stats and then revive again. He could take that penalty for the larger purpose. But it was the process leading up to death Ark was worried about, not the actual death.

‘I hadn’t thought the incomplete Slime’s Immortality Pill would give such a penalty.’

The Slime's Immortality Pill that the rehabilitation members ate wasn't the 'genuine' product. Normally it would take 118 hours to create the Slime's Immortality Pill. Creating 6 would require 708 hours! Instead of the version made using Survival Cooking, the rehabilitation members were forced to eat the B grade products created using the Vision scroll. And only 70% of the original pill was applied. The problem wasn't the diminished stats. The penalty applied to the B grade Slime's Immortality Pills was unimaginable.....and it was attached to the skills learnt.

-You have learned the racial skill 'Slime's Time.' Slime's Time: Once a day, you can choose between two skills.

1. It is possible to cover your body with a coating of slime for 10 minutes. Any physical damage or fall damage will be 100% nullified. However, there is a 100% chance that magic will cause additional damage, with magic resistance decreasing by 100%.

(B grade product penalty: If you ingest an incomplete immortality pill and become covered with slime, your whole body will become sensitive and the pain felt when attacked will be amplified by 50 times)

2. You can call any type of slimes that exist within a 500 metre radius.

(B grade product penalty: When ingesting an incomplete product, the slimes called will not be recognized your allies. Instead they will attack all users.

It was a truly ridiculous penalty. When attacked in New World, the most pain they would feel was a mild shock. But this was x50 amplification.

"I can't use the 'Slime's Time' skill."

Shambala had complained when he ate the B grade product and saw the results. There was no point in using the skill when the pain was a few times worse than in reality. There would be a large cost if Jjak-tung and the others blocked the gateway for 10 minutes. They would have to withstand worse pain than in reality.

"For Jjak-tung hyung and the other hyungs to use Slime's Time....."

'Hyung-nims.....!'

Ark swallowed his rising emotions and shouted.

"I'll do whatever it takes to make sure the mission is successful!"

It was a really desperate dash.

‘Kekeke, I can’t miss such a fun scene.’

The relationship between Dedric and the rehabilitation members wasn’t that good. Before he was a summon, Dedric had been bullied in the past. Thus he was fixated on his status after growing a little bit.

‘I’m an aristocrat of the Netherworld.’ That was the motto he kept repeating to himself and he had an obsession with being the number 2.

Anyway, in the past Ark had officially declared Dedric was the number 2 so his obsession became even worse. So naturally he treated Razak, Radun, Lariette and Buksil as his subordinates.

“I’m a nobleman of the Netherworld and the number 2. I am the leader in Master’s absence!”

He acted like the leader whenever Ark wasn’t there. It was a trivial thing but Ark recognized Dedric’s arrogance. Anyway, while Ark was in the Netherworld his pets had to remain summoned. He could easily pack Radun and Razak away. However, Ark often left Lariette alone. In addition, he didn’t trust Buksil. So Dedric was the cleverest among the people Ark had left. That was the reason why Dedric’s number 2 position was solidified. And not long ago, a critical incident took place for Dedric. Ark had been sworn in as the Commander of the Dark Brothers=Baran clan alliance.

‘Wait, I’m the person immediately following Master? So I’m the actual number 2 among these thousands of allied forces? F-finally.....I’ve come a long way! I’ve been rewarded for all my troubles!

The power crazy bat made a huge mistake. He revealed his true colours as soon as Ark wasn’t there.

“Huhuhu, Master isn’t here so I’m the Commander of this army! I’ll tell you in advance but I’m not as kind as Master!”

Dedric flew around Haman Fortress and stared interfering. At this point some people wanted to tackle him..... But their clan elders were completely caught by Ark so none of the Baran dared to defy Dedric. And Lariette and Buksil saw his behaviour as normal. But Dedric was hot headed and crossed the limits.

“Hey you guys, what are you doing?” (TL note: talking informally which is considered really rude in Korea.)

Dedric talked like this towards the rehabilitation members. The rehabilitation members made a dissatisfied expression and glared at him.

“What? What did you say just now?”

‘Ugh, these guys.....Why do their eyes look so murderous?’

Dedric thought for a moment that he had made a mistake. But then he shook his head.

‘Ah, no. I can’t be scared. During the siege in Nagaran, Master was always the captain. These guys are Master’s minions. And I’m just under Master, the number 2! These guys are also below me! If they’re disobeying me then it means they’re rebelling.’

“What’s this? Where are you staring? Are you acting defiant? You really want to die?”

Dedric had finally pressed the switch for a nuclear bomb. And Dedric was literally flattened into a rice cake by the rehabilitation brothers. He was smashed in just a few minutes but Dedric still didn’t get it.

“Ugh. You bastards.....wait until I tell Master....you’ll die.....”

“Ha? Is that so? Hey guys, this bat wants to be hit even more.”

“Ouch, ouch! S-stop.....stop hitting.....no, no. I forgive you.....”

“Forgive us? Hah, his head has gone crazy from the pain.”

“Ouch, ouch! Huk huk huk, it hurts. Stop beating me. Please forgive me.”

In the end, Dedric was able to escape from the group assault with his entire body bruised.

‘Huhuhu, it serves you right!’

Dedric had suffered from the horrible experience a week ago so he felt pleasure as he saw Jjak-tung being beat up by the Nakujuk. However, Dedric’s laughter gradually disappeared from his face.

“Ugh, this is.....it’s not a joke?”

“Heok, being mangled by the sword.....it really feels like it.”

“Hell.....I never thought it would be this bad.....”

Jjak-tung, Yapsab and Tazza groaned. The pain amplified by 50 times was unimaginable. It really felt like they were being stabbed or a mace was smashing their skulls! Their health didn't decrease by 1% but mentally they were in a critical condition.

"Heok!"

Eventually Yapsab was unable to hold out against the pain and knelt down.

"No, steady yourself! Ugh, if we don't survive.....Ark and the Netherworld will be screwed!"

"I know!"

Yapsab clenched his teeth and slowly raised his trembling knees. Then he dragged his body over and grabbed the Nakujuk's ankles.

"This fucking bastard!"

The group of Nakujuk hacked at Yapsab's body.

Although Yapsab screamed every time, he never let go.

"Kuaaak. Rehabilitation.....the rehabilitation group.....show your spirit!"

"We....for justice.....can't give up....no!"

"Ooh oh oh oh! Let's show them our willpower!"

Jjak-tung staggered before roaring and making an impassioned speech. Then he stomachached the surging pain and muttered.

"Ku, don't scream..... For my allies.....don't fall....."

"It's tough to endure.....I'd rather sing....."

"Oh, that's good.... Hum, ku.....okay..... Bodies of my comrades....heok, exceed....exceed....forward....forward....!"

Jjak-tung stared at the Nakujuk with bloodshot eyes and started singing a military song. His voice became even louder as he felt more pain. Even the battle obsessed Nakujuk's flinched and retreated a little bit.

"T-that guy.....I never realised he was like that....!"

Dedric stuttered as he watched the scene. Dedric could no longer deride or laugh at the rehabilitation group. It was like an 80s war film that even managed to tug at a bat's heartstrings.

"Damn! Those guys.....why do they look so cool?"

'Ya, what's going on? Why isn't surveillance mode working properly?'

At that time, Dedric heard Ark's voice in his ears.

"Idiot! Now's not the time for that. Don't you know how brave Jjak-tung is by blocking the enemies? Huk, I.....I really can't see in front of me because of my tears....."

'Noisy, if we die here then don't you think Jjak-tung hyung's sacrifice will be for nothing? If you don't come right now then I'll kill you!'

"Sheesh, Master really doesn't shed blood or tears!"

Dedric rubbed his eyes and wiped away his tears. Then he looked at Jjak-tung still singing a military song and saluted.

"You guys are true soldiers!"

It was a really nice atmosphere thanks to the music when Dedric's eardrums trembled from Ark's shout.

'Ya, do you really want to die? Why aren't you flying right now?'

"Understood. I understand! Damn, a unit of archers is approaching from 3 o'clock!"

Dedric looked at Jjak-tung for a moment before flying upwards. Anyway, Ark's group was once again able to receive Dedric's assistance with the enemies.

'That's the final gateway!'

Ark used Dark Dance to avoid the Nakujuk and headed towards the gateway. He had no reason to fight against the Nakujuk. If they fought then Ark's group wouldn't be able to reach the next checkpoint within 10 minutes and the Nakujuk would swarm and surround them. The area between the 2nd and 3rd gateways was packed with buildings and houses. Thus Ark's group had to break through the windows of building in order to get to the other side. Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae could rush and penetrate through the enemies while Shambala had footwork

comparable to Dark Dance. However, Lariette's evasive skills were no match for the Nakujuk.

'It's not possible.'

Ark clicked his tongue and then carried Lariette.

"I'm sorry. But it's the only way for now....."

"Ah, no I'm fine."

"Lariette-nim please use Meditation and concentrate on recovering your mana."

"Yes....."

Lariette replied in a weak voice as her face became redder.

"Damn, one step too late!"

Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae complained as they stared at Ark with envious eyes. Honestly, there was nothing to be envious about. It was a game but he could still feel their weight when carrying someone. So naturally it became more difficult to use Dark Dance and the percentage of completion fell. But if they lost their healer than the special attack corps would 100% be wiped out. Even though it was a burden, it wasn't possible to drop Lariette.

"That's it, let's break through the last gateway!"

Shambala arrived first at the gateway and shouted while defeating the Nakujuk there. Ageiron was a circular city built around the world tree. If they passed through the final gateway then they would appear in front of the world tree. There were no visible Nakujuk between the gateway and the world tree. The world tree was a sacred place so the Baran hadn't built any buildings around it.

"The world tree will be there once we go inside!"

There was a gap in the roots of the world tree where only a few people could pass. Yuzuria would no doubt be hidden inside it. Ark ran carrying his ally and jumped into the gap. When Jjak-tung blocked the gateway, the size was large enough that 3 people were required to block it. But the entrance of the world tree was small enough that Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae would be enough to block it from the Nakujuk.

"These guys went into the world tree!"

“Seize them, kill the bastards!”

Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae turned around and stared at the Nakujuk rushing towards the gateway.

“Now it’s our turn.”

“Huhuhu, if it’s for justice then we’re not afraid of death.”

“Go Ark. Slime’s Time, NO1!”

Thus Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae threw their bodies to block the advancing enemy. Thanks to their sacrifice Ark, Shambala and Lariette were able to enter the world tree.

“.....Let’s hurry up.”

Ark immediately started running through the interior of the world tree. Although he didn’t show it, Ark was inwardly grateful towards the rehabilitation members. This was a game so they wouldn’t really die. It wasn’t anything irreversible. But it wasn’t an easy task to willingly go to an unpleasant death. In addition, they had to suffer from brutal pain for 10 minutes.

“You don’t deserve those hyungs.”

“I think so too.”

Ark answered with a laugh. So they ran without looking back. They had to revive the world tree within the next 10 minutes or the rehabilitation members’ sacrifices would be for nothing. They quickly reached the centre of the world tree.

“This is the world tree.....!”

Lariette looked around with wide eyes. The centre of the dead world tree was rotted with hollow ceilings. The light of the full moon seeped through the hole and illuminated the vines, moss and mysterious glowing chestnut like fruits. In the centre a conspicuous bud was located with moonlight concentrated on it.

“Lariette-nim, it’s fine now.”

“Huh?”

Lariette looked confused at Ark’s words. Then she blushed and quickly got off Ark. Lariette had been held in Ark’s arms until then. Anyway, thanks to alleviating the baggage (?) Ark felt much lighter as he walked towards the bud. A similar bud had been inside Yggdrasil. And it also had a nucleus.

"Perhaps Yuzuria has a nucleus as well? Eh?"

Ark's face showed perplexity as he lifted the bud. As expected, a recessed pit was carved inside the bud. But the important nucleus wasn't there.

'What happened? Did the Nakujuk move it somewhere else?'

If that's the case then the problem was serious. Then the walls started shaking and a wooden sound was heard. Ark moved back and saw that one of the walls was moving. There were successive sounds like the wall was being broken with an axe. The same situation repeated many times before there was suddenly a huge presence. It was a giant covered in wood, similar to the Plant Golem he saw in the Underground World! The black eyes embedded in the wood started at the group.

".....How did humans get here? Are you 'his' colleague?"

"Who are you? Are you Yuzuria?"

"Yuzuria?"

The wooden giant shouted and raised his fist.

"These guys have come to steal away Yuzuria! How dare foreigners do something like this!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

He struck his fist and the whole room shook. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-The boss monster Chieftain of the Nakujuk 'Wigurima' has appeared.

'Damn, I knew it. I knew it would be like this!'

Ark swore as he checked the information window. Ark had expected it thanks to his luck. First he had been stabbed in the eye by a child and now he was being blocked by a boss monster. It was also a level 600 Nakujuk chieftain! He didn't know how a wooden monster became a chieftain but the situation was quite troublesome.

'There's approximately 8 minutes left. Can we defeat the boss monster in that time?'

He honestly didn't think it was possible. If it was Ark alone.

'.....I'm not alone!'

Ark was with Shambala, who had conquered the Evil Silrion arena with him as Blue Sword. And they also had Lariette to recover and assist. The users gathered were those with 3 hero professions. Although it was impossible to escape from thousands of Nakujuk, 3 against 1 for a boss monster were good enough odds to try it. No, wasn't it 5 against 1 if he included Dedric and Razak? Huhuhu, there was a possibility that they could defeat it.

'The problem is that the time limit is 8 minutes.....'

"Master danger!"

Then Dedric's voice shook his eardrums. Wigurima had approached him while Ark was busy thinking. He was surprisingly nimble for a giant who was 10 metres tall. Ark instantly used Dark Dance and managed to avoid Wigurima's punch. It smacked into the floor and the whole space shook.

'The attacks are strong but its movements are pretty slow. No matter how powerful it is, we can still beat it. It won't be that difficult to hunt it.'

That's what Ark was thinking.

Syusuk, syu syu syu su suk!

Why did vines suddenly enter the ground when Wigurima's fist hit? At the same time, a sharp tree trunk emerged from where Ark's foot was. An attack he never would've imagined! Ark rotated his body agilely and managed to avoid the attack. But that was just the beginning. The trunk changed its angle and shot forward like a snake. In addition, every time he moved the branches would stretch out like a net around Ark. Then it managed to pierce his side.

-You have received a critical hit. 700 damage!

<You have been poisoned by the corrosive venom. You will lose 20 health every 5 seconds. If it isn't treated within 3 minutes then the wound will corrode and you will receive 1000 corrosion damage>

'Huk, this, this is.....?'

Ark couldn't understand what was happening. And he didn't have time to think about it.

"Huhuhu, I'll rip you to shreds and make you into compost!"

Making into compost instead of eating him.....after being covered in bark, the monster really had become like a tree. Naturally Ark didn't want to be made into compost so he avoided the branches. However, avoiding it aggravated the situation even further. Every time Wigurima punched the floor, sharper tree trunks would emerge.

"Damn, what the?"

Shambala swung his sword and cut one of the tree trunks. But it might've been better to avoid the attacks. When the tree trunk was cut, it looked like it used stem cell division to divide into ten more trunks. Then Shambala also received critical hits from the dozens of tree trunks.

"Ugh, I'm being hit by the trees.....!"

Larlette was also the same. The tree trunks would just change its direction by 90 degrees and moved around her shield.

"Ack!"

They never missed! Whenever Wigurima attacked, the tree trunks would not disappear until it hit its target. It constantly divided and would only disappear after delivering a critical blow.

"Damn, what is this....?"

"But there has to be a weakness."

Ark murmured in a low voice and observed Wigurima's attack pattern. Ark had dealt with numerous bosses so far. Bosses in New World usually had one ingenious technique. If users just jumped in blindly while trusting in their levels and skills, often they would encounter that technique and die. The high or low levels were of secondary importance. It was critical to identify the attack patterns and weaknesses of the boss. That was the key to defeating bosses in New World.

'All boss monsters have a weakness!'

Ark, Shambala and Larlette carefully observed the boss monster. At first glance it looked perfect but there was a loophole in Wigurima's technique. Ark avoided the incoming attack by a tree trunk and explained.

"Shambala, there is a chance whenever they attack!"

"What?"

"Look, the tree trunks can divide into tens or hundreds but they only attack one target. Even though I avoided the attack just then, it didn't bother to attack you when you were right next to me. It looks like the entire attack can only focus on one person. And once his arm is rooted to the bottom, he can't move."

".....Then the flashy attacks are just a trick?"

Shambala looked at the tree trunks again and nodded. That's right. There were dozens of them but they only had one goal. Even if Wigurima used both arms, he could only attack 2 people at most. Once he started the attack, he was vulnerable until the target was hit. He couldn't move whenever his fist was against the floor.

"Heh, he has such a surprising weakness."

"Now have you come up with a plan?"

Syu syu syu syu syuk!

Ark once again avoided the flying tree trunks and shouted.

"Lariette-nim, please step back as much as possible! You should only use recovery and healing magic from that place. Razak, stay in front of Lariette and defend her."

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak nodded and went over to Lariette.

"Dedric, you take one of the tree trunks. If you dodge as much as possible and Lariette uses recovery magic then you should be able to hold on."

"Eek, why? Why do I have to?"

"I don't have time for your jokes. Just do it!"

Ark shouted while Dedric turned his head with a discontented expression. Although Razak had high health and defense, his agility was low. On the other hand, Dedric was agile and could take advantage of 100% of the space by flying. Dedric would probably last three or four times longer than Razak. Of course, his defense meant he would lose 50%~60% of his health, but with Taunt Lariette didn't have to worry about being attacked and could focus on healing him. If she was all the way back there then recovery wouldn't be a problem.

"Hey, this wooden bastard, bring it on!"

"Ugh, this bat.....!"

"I'll go first. I want to test out some footwork."

Shambala ran forward like lightning. As expected, Wigurima drove his fist into the ground and shot up the tree trunks as a barrier. The barrier was formed from dozens of tree trunks that all struck Shambala at the same time. But Shambala just moved among the tree trunks like a guided missile!

"Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!" *

Shambala spoke the short characters. And each character formed a symbol that his body moved along in order to avoid the trunks. Shambala's characteristic footwork was 'Blink.' But his footwork wasn't perfect. Blink was originally classified as one of the 'Yeol' footwork. Shambala's currently had learned the remaining types of footwork. Needless to say, Ark wasn't the only one who had been growing in New World. While Ark had been playing the game, other users had also been playing and learning new skills. Shambala was the same. He had received a quest from Isabel to rally the various sects of the Dark Brothers. In fact, this quest was a process where he could learn new Saint Assassin skills. The Dark Brothers had scattered around and after hundreds of years, they had developed different techniques. One clan was footwork, another fighting with short swords, the path of assassination.....thus Shambala learned the skills after visiting each clan and forcing them to surrender. There was a strange fate between Ark and Shambala. That strange fate also existed with other users. Why? Because this was New World, a game originally created for users.

"Uhh, this bastard...!"

Wigurima cursed as Shambala avoided all the attacks. The tree trunks increased by hundreds every time an attack failed. Meanwhile, Dedric was also flying in the sky and desperately avoiding the tree trunks. No matter how much the tree trunks increased, they did not attack Ark or Lariette at all. Ark approached from behind and took out a sword before making it explode.

"There's no time, Blade Storm!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa!

The intense swirling fragments gathered around Wigurima. It caused tremendous damage to Wigurima's health.....

"What, what the? Damage.....!"

Blade Storm had blasted the bark off him and Wigurima's health went straight down. But after a brief moment, his health started recovering at an enormous pace.

“The bark!”

Ark exclaimed at the quickly growing bark. New bark was growing in the place where the bark had been torn out by the swirling debris.

“Ugh!”

In the meantime, Shambala had stumbled and received a critical hit. Lariette instantly used healing and recovery magic to restore his health and undo the poisoning. But Wigurima’s recovery was different from Shambala’s. There was no mana gauge on Wigurima. Didn’t that mean he could use the skill indefinitely since he wouldn’t run out of mana?

“Impertinent fellow!”

Wigurima struck the floor again with a huge fist. His goal was to attack Ark. While Ark evaded using Dark Dance, this time Shambala attacked from behind using Torpedo sword. But the result was the same.

“Damn, what the hell is this?”

“Kukuku, you fools, do you know now? This body is invincible. Now you have no choice but to become compost! Come on, die! Die and feed me!”

Wigurima frantically extended the tree trunks like crazy. An attack which wouldn’t stop until it hit the target! A boss whose health wouldn’t decrease! In addition, Ark also had a time limit. There was 5 minutes before Bul-kkun’s skill would run out. After 5 minutes, hundreds of Nakujuk would swarm here.

‘Unbelievable. Is there another way?’

While Shambala was being attacked, Ark sighed and looked around the room. Blade Storm was Ark’s strongest attack skill. He had no choice but to look for another way after Blade Storm didn’t do any damage. Just then Ark’s wandering eyes noticed the huge hanging fruits. So far, he hadn’t really paid attention to it.....but why would those things be hanging there? Was it really just a part of the background? Ark used his powers of observation and examined the nuts. The nuts had huge burrs on its surface like a chestnut. And it made a robust ringing sound when he attacked it with his sword.

‘Wait.....is there a way to take advantage of this?’

Ark’s clever brain started to think.

‘Okay, trying won’t do any harm. Let’s give it a shot!’

“Shambala, please hold on a bit more!”

“This bastard, do you think it’s that easy? Huk! Yeol, Sun!”

Shambala cursed and quickly avoided the tree trunks. As expected from someone who learnt Kung Fu, his movements and reaction rate was a lot faster than normal users. Anyway, Ark chose a suitable fruit that lined up with Wigurima and used Riposte. The nut with a tremendous weight shook for a little bit and swung. At this point Wigurima had noticed Ark’s intention. However, his arms were stuck to the ground so he couldn’t move even when his eyeballs rolled around wildly. Ark used Riposte continuously while matching the timing with the swing of the nut. Finally, the nut accelerated enough that it slammed into Wigurima’s side.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Wigurima roared as it hit his stomach and stumbled a few steps before suddenly flopping down onto the ground.

“Ugh, these cheeky bastards.....gag, cough!”

Wigurima had suffered enormous damage but the wooden bark was once again regenerating.

‘Sheesh, he didn’t receive damage even with this?’

Ark was staring with astonishment at the scene when he noticed something. When Wigurima coughed.....it was only for a little bit, but he saw something in his throat. It was a sphere the size of a watermelon. Ark had seen a similar sphere before.

‘That’s it, it must be Yuzuria’s nucleus!’

Ark now understood Wigurima’s special ability. Wigurima had swallowed the nucleus of the world tree Yuzuria. The world tree originally had power to adjust nature. Thus those skills become available to Wigurima after he swallowed Yuzuria’s nucleus. Perhaps that was why his body was covered in bark. Thanks to the shock, he had almost vomited it out.

‘Aha, that’s why he mentioned stealing Yuzuria when he first appeared.’

If that’s the case?

‘There is a way to steal Yuzuria’s nucleus!’

“Shambala, Lariette-nim, the fruit! Attack him using the fruits!”

Fighting bosses were enjoyable once a method was found. If they defeated it then huge amounts of experience and items were sure to come pouring out. Ark used Riposte on the fruits near Wigurima. Shambala used a skill which pushed the fruits and even Lariette and Razak used Shield Stroke to shake the fruits. Wigurima used the tree trunks as a barrier but he couldn't stop the attacks. Wigurima was hit with all three fruits and shook. After getting hit by dozens of fruit, Wigurima sat down and vomited.

“Cough, ku.....oh no....!”

At the same time a sphere half emerged from his mouth. Ark threw his body, grabbed Razak and shouted.

“Now, Razak transform!”

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack!

Razak instantly turned into the Saw blade. Then the whip flew across the room and grabbed the sphere.

“I'm sorry but its finder's keepers!”

The sphere flew into Ark's hands and an information window appeared.

-Yuzuria's Heart

This is the heart of Yuzuria, the world tree who maintained the balance of Seutandal.

Although all the life had drained from the previous body, Yuzuria placed the last remnants in this heart. If equipped with the necessary conditions, Yuzuria's heart can be used to revive the world tree.

As expected, the sphere was Yuzuria's heart.

“Huk, my.....my Yuzuria.....Yuzuria.....Kuaaaaak!”

Wigurima threw back his head and screamed as he lost the sphere. At the same time, his body was covered in a blue smoke and all the bark fell off. The monster that appeared.....looked like a relative of the Nakujuk commander Kaljapeu who he defeated in the valley village. His level also dropped from 600 to 350.

“Oh, so that's your real body?”

"T-this guy.....give it to me, that's mine!"

"Don't speak nonsense! Lariette-nim, the 3 set offensive buffs!"

"Yes, the great warrior's soul.....Hero's Spirit, Warrior's Concentration, Storm Breathing!"

"There's no time. Don't worry about defense and just focus your attacks!"

The boss battle had started 8 minute ago. Now there were 2 minutes left. Although his level had dropped, he was still a middle-ranking boss. The 3 people concentrated their attacks without worrying about defense. Thanks to the rotation of Lariette's recovery magic, all of their health was at 100%. Ark, Shambala and Lariette ignored their defense and used their deadly kills to attack Wigurima. Wigurima didn't even dare to counter attack. He just screamed and hid behind his shield like a turtle.

"Aaaaak, h-help. Guards, guards!"

'What, guards?' Don't tell me there's another Nakujuk here?'

Ark flinched and looked around. However there was no reaction.

'What the? Was he just lying?'

Ark snorted and used Dark Blade tirelessly. Suddenly a violent light appeared and an information window popped up.

-A new group cooperation has been registered.

Cooperation: When your profession-specific skill aligns by 70% with your allies, there is an opportunity to learn a cooperative attack.

The current cooperative rating of Ark-nim, Lariette-nim and Shambala-nim is 83%. In addition, the profession-specific skills have met the criteria and a new group cooperation has been registered. However, the chances of activating the play are 5% and if any of the 3 people fail to connect the skills in the time limit then it will be cancelled.

* Currently available group cooperation

-Wrath of the Gods

Dark Blade (Attribute: Darkness) = Torpedo Sword (Attribute: Lightning) = Grand

Cross (Attribute: Holy)

<Cooperation success: A chance to trigger +500% additional damage to each skill>

‘Eh? W-what is this?’

Ark read the information window with a surprised expression. While everyone was reading the information window, the light around them started flickering.

‘I don’t know what this is but there’s no time left.....this is a chance!’

“Dark blade!”

Ark activated his skill. At that moment it disappeared and a huge black sword appeared on top of Wigurima’s head. Shambala checked the information window and also quickly used Torpedo Sword. Then Shambala’s dagger also disappeared and a spark was added to the black blade. The skill attributes were being piled on. The cooperation had been progressing when Ark belatedly flinched and looked at Lariette.

‘Ah, for Lariette-nim to handle an unexpected situation like this.....’

“Grand Cross!”

But Ark’s worry was needless. Lariette immediately used Grand Cross like she was familiar with cooperative plays. Then the sparks floating around the huge black blade formed a cross and descended on Wigurima’s head.

Kwararak, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

An intense sound rang out through the area. Each skill dealt an extra x500% damage! Wigurima’s 30% health vanished instantly. They had defeated Wigurima with 1 minute left.

-Your level has risen.

-Your level has risen.

All three of them went up 2 levels.

“Yes, it was a success. Group cooperation!”

Lariette jumped up and down excitedly. Ark stared at Lariette stupidly and asked.

“.....Lariette-nim, have you tried group cooperation before?”

“Huh? Of course. Most of my hunts had been in groups.”

When users over level 100 hunted together, occasionally there was a chance to do a group cooperation play. Lariette had always hunted in a party so she was familiar with it. On the other hand, Ark had also hunted alone so he never knew such techniques existed. He had also only grouped up with NPCs and the rehabilitation members so the group cooperation couldn't be activated.

‘I'll have to ask Lariette-nim about cooperation later.’

“But this is the first time that a group cooperation dealt so much damage. Normally 5 or more people who trigger the cooperation and they would only deal 200~300% damage at most..... And the special effects weren't that flashy either.”

Lariette marvelled at the power of ‘Wrath of the Gods.’ It was natural since this group cooperation involved all hero professions. The cooperation between general professions and professions who fought against the Dark Lord in the past couldn't be compared.

‘For the moment.....’

Ark looked around and picked up the item that Wigurima dropped.

Steel Shield of Hatred and Despair (Magic)

Armour: Steel Shield

Defense: 160(+30)

Durability: 55/100

Weight: 70

User restriction: Level 200 or higher with Warrior profession

The steel shield of the Nakujuk chieftain Wigurima. Wigurima was once the top commander of the Nakujuk and he was recommended to absorb Yuzuria's Heart by the other chiefs. However, its loss caused Wigurima to die with hate and despair. Wigurima's despair and hatred was so strong that it influenced the equipment and created a special option.

<Option: Strength +10, Stamina +10, Defense+ 30>

<Special option: You can use ‘Desire for Survival.’ In a crisis, you can use ‘Desire for

Survival' to change your hatred into defense. Defense will increase by 50% for 20 minutes. Not available for those without the 'Hatred' stat. Reusable time: 1 hour>

'What the, what is this?'

Ark frowned as he read the information window. It was easy once they discovered the method but they had still defeated a level 600 boss. But the compensation was only a magic shield? Just like before, the special option wasn't available unless the person had the Hatred stat. Who would want something like that?

'Dammit, in this situation even 1 penny is valuable.....yet all the boss dropped was an item worth 2 million won at most? In addition, only 2 levels was gained? Was this a joke? But he did change to a middle-class boss after the sphere was vomited out.....'

That's right. Wigurima had clearly been a level 600 boss. But he fell to level 350 after vomiting out the sphere. Because of that, the experience and compensation also lowered.

'Sheesh, if I didn't have the time limit then I would've searched for another way to defeat the boss.....;

Ark sighed and picked up the shield. He had already covered ownership of items with Lariette. And Shambala wasn't a person who would make trouble over one item. Therefore Ark monopolized the item without any problems. Although he was dissatisfied with the loot, the whole thing was over.

'Now I just have to revive the world tree to complete Magaro's quest and the Lore quest!'

Ark tried to calm his pounding heart as he approached the bud in the centre. Then he flinched and stopped walking.

Act 8: Red Man's Counterattack

"That Wigurima, serves him right."

Overlooking the world tree Yuzuria.....

A big, burly Nakujuk laughed and muttered.

"He's been so arrogant since he swallowed the heart of the world tree."

He was a Nakujuk warrior called 'Kuranka.' In fact, the original chieftain of the Nakujuk was Kuranka. But while he was away, Wigurima swallowed the world tree's heart and stole his position. Thanks to that, Kuranka had been demoted from a chieftain to an escort. However, their past wasn't the reason why Kuranka didn't help Wigurima.

"They're all performing to your will."

Kuranka spoke towards the man next to him. It was a man with red hair wearing a white mask! Ark had received <The Resurrection of the Netherworld's World Tree> quest which was a Lore quest. The boss of that kind of quest wouldn't collapse so easily. Yes, originally there were supposed to be Kuranka and 10 guards in order to supplement Wigurima's weaknesses. The last trial of the quest would've been fighting all of them..... That was the original intention. But the one who stopped this from proceeding and controlled the Nakujuk was the Red Man. The Red Man nodded and replied.

"Everything will be done according to the prophecy."

"Kukukuku, now we can accomplish the Nakujuk's 100 year desire. And the Netherworld will be in our hands....."

Kuranka made a smile of satisfaction as he stared at the Red Man.

"But what will you do about Jewel's group? Do they have any value anymore? Is it really necessary to keep the promise of giving them the southern region of the Netherworld?"

".....The Hermes guild that Jewel belongs to holds quite a considerable power in middle-earth. I can't use the Nakujuk for everything so they still have some value. I'll leave it just in case."

"If my Lord says so....."

Kuranka looked dissatisfied but bowed politely. Then he looked at Ark and muttered in a tense voice.

"But what is that guy doing?"

Ark was pacing in front of the bud while holding Yuzuria. The Red Man murmured in a voice which held a mixture of a laugh and contempt.

"He's probably savouring his joy now that he's reached this point. He came all the way here to revive Yuzuria after all. What else would he be doing?"

It was at that time. While the Red Man was speaking, Ark suddenly pulled something out of his bag. Then he began to draw a magic circle using the oddly glowing sand. The Red Man's eyes became distressed as he saw the scene.

"Oh, t-that is Magaro's Dimensional Movement Powder! No way, this guy.....stop, stop it!"

"Huh? What are you.....huk?"

Kuranka had tilted his head to one side with confusion. But then Ark finished the magic circle and a gate appeared. Then Ark, Shambala and Lariette jumped into the gate and it slowly faded away.

"T-this.....stupid! He took Yuzuria away? What nonsense.....no way.....did he detect my purpose? Such a thing....."

The Red Man was unable to hide his confusion as he murmured before suddenly turning his body violently.

"He.....he wants to restore Yuzuria in the Baran clan's territory! I never thought he would come up with such a cheeky idea after coming all the way here. I have to stop him or else it will disrupt my plan. Gather the troops. It isn't that easy to restore Yuzuria. There is still time. Catch him and recover Yuzuria's Heart!"

"Yes, I'll gather the troops!"

Kuranka hurriedly ran away.

"Kekeke, I came up with something good."

Ark smirked as he exited from the gate. In fact, Ark had intended to resurrect Yuzuria right there in Ageiron. No, he thought that he had to resurrect it there. But he noticed something when checking the information window for Yuzuria's Heart. It stated that 'the necessary conditions needed to be in place' in order to resurrect the world tree. If Yuzuria's Heart had been attached to the bud then he would've ignored that information. But he became aware of a different possibility when he saw that Wigurima swallowed Yuzuria's heart. In other words, didn't it mean Yuzuria could be resurrected anywhere outside of Ageiron as long as the necessary conditions were met?

'Of course it is limited to the Netherworld and there has to be the full moon shining but.....'

The place protected by the world tree received enormous additional effects. Popo was only a seed yet didn't he still bring huge benefits to Lancel village? If he resurrected Yuzuria in Ageiron then the benefits would go to the Nakujuk.

'Am I crazy? Why should I do something good for the Nakujuk? There was still time before the full moon rose completely. Meanwhile I have to make preparations to resurrect Yuzuria at Haman Fortress. Perhaps the necessary conditions in the information window.....'

Ark could already guess what was required to revive the world tree. It probably referred to 'Sacred Soil.' And Ark knew a place with sufficient amounts of soil. Lancel village.....the place where Popo was planted and the fields were sprinkled with Sacred Soil. Now that Lancel village's food shortage problem was solved, it shouldn't be a problem to take some Sacred Soil. In addition, the effects of the Sacred Soil had been increased thanks to Ark using Miracle Nursing on it in the past. The effect was sufficient enough to raise vegetables.

'If I resurrect Yuzuria at Haman Fortress then there will be a huge benefit.'

Yes, Ark hadn't been aware of the Red Man's presence or his plan. He just thought about the way to get more money and came to that conclusion.

"Ah, Ark nyang!"

When Ark showed up in the centre of Lancel village, Jana who had been in the midst of dancing flew towards him. Then she noticed Lariette and pricked her ears.

"What is this nyang? There's a different girl this time nyang? You really are a flirt nyang!"

"Noisy, I have no time to be playing around!"

Ark pushed Jana and ran across the square.

"Nyang! He pushed me nyang? How dare he nyang? Ark is a bad man nyang."

Jana then raised her eyebrows and shook her tail.

"Nyang nyang nyang, but Jana doesn't hate a bad man nyang. I'm somehow more attracted nyang."

And a suspicious look started to grow on Jana's fans' faces.

'Isn't a bad man too mainstream?'

‘Shall I try it once?’

Anyway, Ark paid no attention to things like that. From now on, it was a fight against time. He had to resurrect Yuzuria while there was still a full moon in the Netherworld. It hadn’t taken as much time to break through Ageiron as he thought so there was 2 hours left. He had to move the Sacred Soil and then make preparations to revive Yuzuria.

“Galen ajusshi!”

“Oh, Ark? You have come. Your store.....”

“I didn’t come to talk about that. Please urgently gather people!”

“People? What is going on?”

Galen asked and Ark explained the situation in the Netherworld as quickly as possible.

“You mean the Netherworld where Bona and the children are from? I understand. The Baran clan are already valued customers of our village. In addition, you’re the owner of the Sacred Soil. I’ll immediately mobilize the villagers to gather the Sacred Soil from the field. How much do you need?”

“Around 2x as much as the soil used for Popo’s flower bed should be enough.”

“Then that’s around 3~4 fields. I’ll prepare it now.”

Galen immediately ran and gathered the farmers. Ark had greatly impressed the farmers in the past while moving the Sacred Soil so they obeyed without any complaints. After one hour had passed, there were four large wagons filled with sufficient amounts of Sacred Soil.

“Then I’ll take this and go.”

“I wish you success.”

Ark finished the preparations and drew the magic circle.

‘Wait, don’t I have to use several kilograms of Dimensional Movement Powder in order to move these wagons? Aie, it doesn’t matter. The powder will be useless once the Netherworld rises anyway.....’

Ark made up his mind and used the remaining powder to create a huge gate in a corner of the village. Then he entered the gate and Haman Fortress appeared.

“Ark, what happened?”

JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members rushed towards him when he arrived at the fortress. The rehabilitation group who fought against the Nakujuk had already returned to the fortress. Among them was Bul-kkun. They had instantly resurrected in Haman Fortress after dying in Ageiron.

“What the hell? Didn’t you say the Netherworld would rise if you were successful?”

“Did you fail?”

“No, I’ll begin now.”

Ark grinned and explained the circumstances. Then JusticeMan also laughed and slapped Ark’s shoulder.

“Hahaha, as expected from Ark. Who else would think of that in such a situation? Okay, there’s nothing more to say. Summon the soldiers. Let’s start working straight away!”

“Ohhhh, we get to see the resurrection of the world tree with our own eyes?”

Beseutyu and the elders raised their arms with a thrilled look. The Baran soldiers arrived not long afterwards and started shovelling. They needed to make a proper soil bed in order for Yuzuria to plant some roots. Ark regularly raised his head to look at the full moon while it was in progress. The huge full moon had descended enough that it looked like it was touching the hillside.

‘There’s still 40 minutes left. The current pace is sufficient!’

Ark started to feel more relaxed. But suddenly a huge black shape was seen in front of the full moon. It looked like a group of birds which gradually grew larger. Ark narrowed his eyes at it before they suddenly widened after a few moments.

“D-Draken....?”

Yes, the shape revealed in the moonlight were Draken troops crossing the northern mountains. It wasn’t a few like before. There were approximately 500 Drakens approaching! In addition, there were many Nakujuk riding them while holding spears and swords.

“Drakens?”

JusticeMan burst out in surprise as he lifted his head.

"There's so many Drakens.....! W-why? If they had these many Drakens then why hadn't they been used in the war so far?"

It was incomprehensible to Ark and JusticeMan. There was no time to consider the reasons.

"Commander-nim, the Nakujuk have started to advance in the canyon!"

"What, what the?"

JusticeMan jumped up and ran to the walls. Just like the guard said, the Nakujuk were advancing into Kurata canyon. The Nakujuk had begun an all-out assault just as the resurrection of Yuzuria was in sight.

"Everybody hurry up. If Yuzuria is restored then considerable benefits will be applied to us. We have to restore Yuzuria before those guys arrive!"

"U-understood! Hurry!"

The Baran clan frantically shovelled the dirt at JusticeMan's command. Thanks to that, they completed the soil bed before the Draken troops arrived at Haman Fortress. Ark took out Yuzuria's Heart and ran towards the soil bed. And just as he was about to put it into the ground!

Biiiiik-!

Suddenly a huge black eagle flew over Ark's head. In its wake, lightning struck down in front of Ark. An intense shock wave spread around the area. Ark was hit by the shock wave and was blown several metres back before hitting the ground. Thanks to the impact, Yuzuria's Heart tumbled out of his hand.

"Ugh, what, what the?"

Ark wobbled as he raised his body. Then somebody started to walk out of the cloud of dust. The red hair like blood fluttered around as the man wearing the white mask walked forward!

".....Red Man!"

This was the first time he had seen the Red Man close up. He had red hair while his whole face was covered by a white mask and blood was dripping off his red chain armour. In the centre of his armour was an embossed pattern shaped like the Indian god Indra. When the Red Man stepped closer, the chain armour rocked and Indra twitched like it was alive.

‘What, what the? Why is this guy suddenly here.....?’

Ark took one step back from the strange atmosphere. Ark thought that the Red Man held an important clue towards passing Global Exos entrance examination. Thus he had tried to figure out his identity several times. But Ark didn’t have the slightest idea even after making contact with him now. No, he couldn’t even understand why the Red Man emerged now.

‘Why on earth would the Red Man appear here?’

“.....I will be taking back Yuzuria’s Heart.”

“What?”

Ark asked with a stupid face.

“Ha, what’s with this guy?”

“He jumped in alone? What a bold bastard.”

“Hahaha, I’ll smash him before the others come!”

Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae suddenly rushed towards him and swung their swords. But the Red Man disappeared as soon as the swords were lifted.

“Take this.....eh? Huh? Where did he.....huk!”

Bul-kkun had been looking around with confusion when he suddenly sucked in a breath. What the hell? He didn’t know how but the Red Man suddenly appeared close to Bul-kkun’s side. Bul-kkun freaked out and retreated. But it was too late as something emerged from the Red Man’s palm and a roaring sound like a bomb exploding was heard.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

“Heeeeeek!”

Bul-kkun’s body flew back several metres. The Red Man was already moving towards Ddeok-dae before Bul-kkun even hit the ground. Ddeok-dae flinched and raised his shield. However, the Red Man just struck Ddeok-dae’s shield with his palm once again and Ddeok-dae flew back several metres. What the hell just happened? Ark couldn’t understand the situation. Regardless of their levels, Bul-kkun and Ddeok-dae were former gangsters. They had professional fighting skills and their hobby was fighting against others. Although their levels and stats might be lower, their fighting skills was be ranked in the A grade. But those two were

defeated with just one touch. Moreover, the 'Guardian=Assaulter' had the highest defense among the rehabilitation group yet they still lost 30% health and were stunned from one attack.

"T-that bastard.....!"

"Everybody, grab him!"

The rehabilitation members and the Baran clan flocked towards the Red Man. But at that moment, black shapes fell around the Red Man like bombs.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

It was Kuranka and the Nakujuk on the Drakens. Wind blasted through the Fortress as hundreds of Drakens landed. Thanks to the massive amounts of dirt, dust and gravel flying, everybody's field of vision was limited. There were occasional screams from the Baran as they collided with the Nakujuk.

"Huhuhu, slaughter all of them!"

"Stop them. There will be no future for the Baran clan if Haman Fortress is taken!"

'Damn, what's happening?'

Ark fumbled around in the dust as he searched for Yuzuria's Heart. He didn't know how this happened but the most urgent problem was to resurrect the world tree. It didn't matter if he died here as long as the world tree was revived. If he failed then everything would be finished.

'T-there it is!'

Ark soon found Yuzuria's Heart stuck in the ground. It was rolling away thanks to being kicked by the many feet. Treating a world tree like this.....Yggdrasil would've wept if he saw the scene. Anyway, Ark hurriedly ran towards Yuzuria's Heart once he noticed it. But the Red Man abruptly ran through the dust cloud towards him.

".....!"

Ark reflexively turned his body and swung his sword. But just like when he took care of Bul-kkun, the Red Man disappeared and appeared at Ark's side. He could sense the Red Man's palm about to touch his side. At that moment, Ark got goose bumps as he felt an eerie feeling. It wasn't his head, but his instincts gave him a fearful warning!

'It is dangerous!'

Ark instantly used Dark Dance. His body quickly moved 10 metres.

'To this degree.....huk, oh my god!'

Naturally he chased Ark. Just as Ark was about to sigh with relief, he felt the Red Man at his back. He had perfectly read Ark's movements and followed. Ark was surprised and once again used Dark Dance but it was too late. Suddenly there was a huge explosion.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, jjejejejeok!

It sounded like something was breaking inside his body. There was a wave of noise as a message window appeared.

-You have been hit by a 'Chakra Wave.'

<You have received the direct impact of 'Chakra Wave' inside your body. Defense is ignored and you have received 800 damage. The shock wave also ruined the balance of mana inside your body and you have lost 1000 mana. Thanks to the severe bruising, your attack speed and movement speed is reduced by 10% for 5 minutes. Your body is also rigid and you will be unable to move for 3 seconds>

'Huh, c-chakra wave?'

Ark was interested in martial arts and had seen the word 'Chakra' before. It would be too long if he explained everything, but Chakra was something that originated in India. In other words, 'Chakra wave' was an Oriental attack.....similar to a ball of energy used in street fighting games. It wasn't shot from a distance, but instead the palm of the hand was used to blow the shock wave directly into the body? Well, this part was common sense.....and the damage Ark received was dreadful. It was a technique which ignored defense and dealt 800 damage. He also lost 1000 mana thanks to the attack. In addition, his attack and movement speed fell and he became rigid.

'What a ridiculous cheat skill.....!'

Ark rolled as he fell and barely managed to maintain his centre as he raised his head. He knew this time. He couldn't deal with this opponent. In fact, he knew it even before he met the Red Man in person. Ark had seen the Red Man fighting in Popo's memory. He had defeated a whole village of raccoons by himself. Even the world tree Yggdrasil couldn't deal with the Red Man. It was common sense to think

that such power was beyond a user. Therefore he had thought of the Red Man as an NPC but.....

‘He is.....a user!’

Eyes of the Cat identified that his information window was different from a NPCs. However, there were only question marks next to his name and level. There were two possible reasons for this. He either hid his identity with a specific skill like Shambala or his was more than 100 levels above Ark. He could guess the level difference between them even without seeing the information window.

‘But I can’t give up. I have to fight and defeat him!’

Ark clenched his teeth and grabbed his sword firmly. However the Red Man wasn’t interested in Ark. He had turned his back to Ark and was walking in the opposite direction.

‘Oh, that reminds me.....!’

Ark stared after the Red Man with stupid eyes. The place Ark had been heading before hit by the Chakra wave was towards Yuzuria’s Heart. Everything would be over if the Red Man got his hands on Yuzuria’s Heart. Ark struggled to raise his body.

Cheng, kwa kwa kwa kwa kwak!

Daggers suddenly flew through the air like a machine gun.

One was thrown towards Yuzuria’s Heart while the others headed towards the Red Man. The Red Man had been about to pick up Yuzuria’s Heart when he was hit by the dagger.

“Ark, what are you doing? Wake up!”

The distinctive form of Shambala came running through the dust cloud.

“Ohhhhh, Shambala nice timing!”

“Healing Touch, Goddess’ Protection!”

Lariette also ran towards him and used her recovery magic. Therefore Ark’s health was recovered and he could move his body.

“Ha, that’s it. Now let’s try this again!”

Ark regained his momentum when Shambala and Lariette appeared. That's right. Ark had no confidence that he would win if he fought the Red Man by himself. If Ark was alone. However, it was different if Shambala and Lariette were also present. It was 1 vs. 3, no with his summons it was 1 vs. 5!

"Dedric and Razak, protect Lariette. Shambala, you know what to do? Let's go from both sides!"

"Okay. Let's catch him. Ark."

"I hear you. Dark blade!"

"Throwing daggers, Torpedo Sword!"

Lariette applied buffs to Ark and Shambala while they split up. They approached in a circular motion on both sides of the Red Man and fired their skills. Ark confused the Red Man using a combination of Dark Dance and Slide while continuously using his chain skill Dark Strike and Riposte. Shambala also used 'Torpedo Sword' and 'Cross Wave' to attack the Red Man. It was the combination of the two users who conquered the Evil Silrion!

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, jjeojeok, woorururung!

The people inside the dust cloud were difficult to distinguish and all that could be seen were lightning, flashes of light and roaring sounds. No, the battle between the Red Man and Ark's group was of a standard where the bystanders couldn't see it even without the dust cloud. There were rapid movements and explosion of chain skills! It was as if the scene of hundreds of people fighting was fast-forwarded at a x4 speed.

"A-amazing!"

Lariette murmured as she stood to the rear with the summons. In fact, the most surprised people were Ark and Shambala.

'I had such tremendous skills?'

When playing the game, sometimes people would experience a strange awakening. Timing and control were needed in many games such as FPS and RPG games. It wasn't easy to calculate the timing and take control in ever-changing situations. But occasionally there were times when people would surprise themselves. It was like a new type of animation. Their adrenaline and concentration in this situation raised their judgements and abilities to 120%! That was Ark and Shambala's state right now. There were two kinds of people. People who become

weaker in a crisis or people who exert more power in a crisis. Ark and Shambala belonged to the latter. If they met an overly strong opponent then their abilities would rise to a standard that they couldn't imagine.

'It's possible to win, the two of us can defeat him!'

Ark became convinced of their victory as he saw the Red Man's health go down. In the end the Red Man's health decreased to 50% and he stumbled before retreating. No matter how high his level or skills, there were still limits to how he could defeat them when Ark, Shambala and Lariette had hero professions. No, that was what Ark thought.

"It was your mistake for jumping in rashly by yourself!"

Ark lifted his sword when the Red Man's eyes suddenly narrowed. He instantly slammed his fist into the ground and shouted.

"Impertinent.....Shiva's Proclamation!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

It was at that time. Suddenly a huge stone statue rose from the ground. It was one of the three Hindu gods. It was a stone statue resembling Shiva with four arms, three eyes and a snake wrapped around the neck. The four arms made of stone moved strangely and the surrounding space became filled with a red light. A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-The skill 'Shiva's Proclamation' has been activated.

Everything within 300 metres of Shiva's statue is within the sphere of influence of the skill.

<When the caster is within Shiva's sphere of influence, all stats will increase by 50%. In addition, his speed became amplified and a limit invulnerable effect is given. The caster will also be able to use the 'Deity' skills within the sphere of influence. The duration ends when the statue is destroyed or the skill is cancelled>

"What, what the? What's with this absurd effect?"

The Red Man's hand then moved towards his waist. Then an intense glare which burned his retinas appeared.....what had happened? While they were thinking, blood suddenly spurted from Ark and Shambala's thighs.

-You have been hit with 'Chakra Blade.'

<You have received 1,200 damage. The durability of your armour and sword has decreased by 20% and your defense has decreased by 20%. Your movement speed has also been reduced by 20% for 5 minutes>

“This is all the hero professions are capable of?”

The Red Man muttered while holding a black sword with a blazing red aura around him.

‘Huk, t-this is....oh my god, that reminds me....!’

Ark’s face became pale as he fell to one knee. The forgotten memories flashed through his head. He had felt like something was lacking for a while. The atmosphere of the Red Man he saw in Popo’s memories was different from the one he had fought so far. Yes, Ark hadn’t called him the Red Man just because of his red hair. The Red Man he saw slaughtering the raccoons had been surrounded by a red aura. At that time he thought it was just the special effects of the flashback.....

‘That’s not it, he must’ve activated this skill back then. He was able to massacre the raccoons thanks to this skill. In other words, this state shows off his capabilities by 100%! Then so far.....’

Although his previous thoughts had been heated, now it cooled down.

“Ark, he’s coming.”

Shambala’s voice interrupted his thoughts.

Kiiiiing....kwa kwang!

At the same time, the Red Man crossed the space at an incredible pace. A dense cloud of dust rose everywhere the Red Man passed. There was a shock like a bomb exploding in his wake that continuously hit Ark. Ark was once again blown back several metres. Shambala appeared behind him and stabbed his back with a dagger, but the Red Man just shook off the damage and attacked Shambala.

“Kuaaaak!”

Blood spouted from his arms in the form of a letter X. The Red Man was confident enough that he didn’t care if he was hit.

He just stopped every movement of their swords and countered right away with a wave attack. Ark and Shambala couldn't attack properly and all they could do was evade. Yet their health still went down to 30%.

"Healing Touch!"

Lariette hurriedly approached and used recovery magic.

"How futile....!"

Then the Red Man turned his head and instantly arrived in front of Lariette.

"Dedric, Razak, stop him!"

"Huk, u-understood." Hey bastard, your enemy is me!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Dedric and Razak rushed towards the Red Man. However the Red Man just moved his sword and an intense shock wave appeared, throwing Dedric and Razak back. The Red Man continuously used his 'Powerful Wave' attack and Lariette quickly fell into a critical condition.

'N-no, it isn't possible to stop him!'

It wasn't possible to handle the Red Man while he was within the sphere of influence of Shiva's Proclamation.

'The information window explained the weakness of Shiva's Proclamation. The first weakness is that the skill will be cancelled if the statue breaks and the second is that there must be a time limit to it. But that guy is almost invincible inside this area. If only the rehabilitation members and the Baran weren't busy fighting the Nakujuk then they could destroy the statue while we distract him.'

Fortunately, Shiva's Territory Proclamation was a spatial limitation skill. If he left the area of 300 metres then the abilities of the Red Man would return to his original state. In other words, the Red Man was only invulnerable inside that area. If Ark, Shambala and Lariette managed to leave the sphere of influence then the Red Man wouldn't be able to excessively attack them.

'We can just stay outside the sphere of influence until Shiva's Proclamation ran out. If the skill has this much effect then the cool down time should be at least 24 hours.'

There was a way to defeat the Red Man after analysing his abilities.

‘But there’s one problem.’

Ark squinted at the sphere rolling around in the dust. That was the problem. The Red Man’s purpose was to obtain Yuzuria’s Heart. And Yuzuria’s Heart was within the sphere of influence. Even if Ark’s group escaped safely out of the sphere of influence, what would be the point if the Red Man got his hands on Yuzuria’s Heart?

‘I have to secure Yuzuria’s Heart first before escaping!’

“Shambala, attack him from the left and right! Lariette-nim, please help him!”

“Heh, what stupid people.”

The Red Man smiled as Ark and Shambala once again attacked him from the sides. The moment the Red Man focused on the two of them, Ark gave a command in his head.

‘Now! Dedric, get Yuzuria’s Heart. Grab Yuzuria’s Heart and then flee!’

“U-understood!”

Dedric realised his Master’s intentions and flew towards Yuzuria’s Heart.

“Hahaha, I got it, I got it. Master! How is it? Aren’t I the best?”

Dedric bragged as he snatched Yuzuria’s Heart. Ark panicked and cursed.

“You stupid child!”

Ark and Shambala already had low health and they risked their lives to draw the Red Man’s attention. Dedric had been successfully thanks to the Red Man’s line of sight being drawn away. At that time, the Red Man’s eyes turned towards him.

“Where is that drivel coming from.....!”

“Run away, run away. Dedric, fly upwards!”

“Huk, u-understood!”

Dedric belatedly grasped the situation and flapped his wings upwards.

“What a bother. Deity skill, Indra’s Lightning!”

Four round spinning disks abruptly rose from the man.

Pajijik, pajijik, pajijijik, flash-!

Sparks rose from the disks engraved with Indra's shape and a huge lightning bolt headed towards Ark, Shambala, Lariette and Dedric. When Indra became angry he exterminated his enemies with lightning, and these lightning bolts tore through the area.

"D-Dedric.....huk!"

Ark saw that the lightning was flying up towards Dedric. A red light continuously flashed as the lightning bolts hit everybody.

-You have received 200 damage from Indra's Lightning!

-You have received 200 damage from Indra's Lightning!

-You have received 200 damage from Indra's Lightning.....

'It's still going on.'

Ark's head turned white as he seemed to burn. The lightning ate at the group's health at a tremendous rate.

'What a strong appetite. It's still eating more health?'

Ark felt an intense urge to curse but his mouth wouldn't open. Thanks to his rigid state caused by the lightning, he couldn't even move a finger. Meanwhile, Lariette and Shambala died from the lightning attack. And 20%, 15%, 10%.....Ark's health also eventually ran out.

"Ugh, t-this bastard...!"

Ark collapsed holding his sword.

Act 9: Netherworld Rises!

"Hik, what, what, what the?"

Buksil wasn't in a normal state. He thought everything had finished when Ark returned from Ageiron.

'Huhuhu, now all that's left to do is use my 'secret weapon' when the Netherworld rises and I can obtain Magaro's legacy. All the cruelty I've had to withstand will become worthwhile!'

Buksil had been happily daydreaming. However, the situation had changed instantly when the Red Man appeared. The resurrection of the world tree was stopped as the Red Man and the Draken troops invaded the fortress. In addition, the Nakujuk were also storming the canyon in order to invade Haman Fortress. JusticeMan and the rehabilitation members did their best to command the soldiers and stop them, but the Draken troops had already broken in and slaughtered the Baran members that they encountered.

"T-take this....!"

Buksil watched as a Baran covered in blood died and gnashed his teeth. There weren't only soldiers in the fortress. General NPCs had been gathered to spread supplies so there were a number of young children. And Buksil was in charge of the warehouse and supplies so he had spent time with all of them. He had carried luggage and shed sweat with the residents and also played with the children. Yet now there were young children being slaughtered in front of him. His fury climbed as he saw the scenes unfolding.

"But there's still Ark, Ark will stop them!"

Buksil didn't like Ark. Although he sometimes showed a surprising face, he would quickly reveal his true colours. But Buksil recognized Ark's skill. Among the users he had met so far, Ark was the strongest one. Obviously Ark would somehow solve this problem. When Buksil looked through the cloud of dust to find Ark, he was engulfed in despair. Ark, Shambala and Lariette were being hopelessly beaten.

'Hiing, he looks so uncool. Let's see him act smug now!'

Buksil didn't know why he laughed. But his face became desperate as strange feelings rose in his heart after seeing fall and fall again.

'.....What the? Why are you doing this? You're not such a character. Doesn't your expression always show confidence in winning? Get up. Where's that handsome act that you used to exploit Lariette? Hurry up and be that person who exploited me!'

He couldn't understand why he was feeling this way. Ark was hateful. Really hateful, but Buksil didn't want to see him look like this. At that moment, the Red Man shot off lightning strikes and Ark was burned to death. Buksil's eyes also being pained from the glare of the lightning.

"T-that bastard....!"

Buksil ground his teeth together as he stared at Ark's collapsed form.

.....This feeling? Buksil felt something in his head come loose as he witnessed Ark dying. The quest would fail and he would die from the Nakujuk once Ark died. The whole situation mixed up in Buksil's head and he became paralyzed. Then all that anger became aimed at the Red Man.

'Because of him. Everything is because of him!'

Buksil glared at the Red Man leisurely approaching Yuzuria's Heart. He pulled out a scroll and shouted.

"Take this you son of a bitch! [Banish]!"

When a scroll was activated, a colour would appear depending on what type it was. The light would hit the target and trigger the special effect. However, the light just floated in front of Buksil and didn't fly towards the Red Man.

"What, what the? Why is this happening? Is it broken after such a long time? No, it shouldn't have.....ah, that's right!"

Everything was so crazy that he forgot to specify a target. Buksil took out the [Low-level Insight] and used it on the Red Man. He needed to confirm the Red Man's ID before the effects of the [Banish] scroll was cancelled.

"Huhuhu, after I find out your ID.....huk, what is this?"

Buksil's smile of satisfaction turned into an expression of bewilderment. The Red Man's information didn't appear even when he used [Insight]. Rather, the Red Man discovered him thanks to the use of the [Insight] scroll. The Red Man flinched and turned around.

"What the, who are you?"

"Hik!"

Buksil screamed and sat on the ground. The Red Man had lifted his sword as soon as he turned his body around. It was a desperate moment! Buksil let out a terrified scream and shouted.

"Hell, I don't know! [Banish], the one about to hit me is the target! Activate! Activate! Activate!"

Buksil shouted with desperation after he was cornered. Once it was triggered, the light was unable to find a target and gradually weakened but now it entwined with Buksil's body. Just a few seconds afterwards, the Red Man's sword touched Buksil and the light soared up the sword towards the Red Man's heart.

Flash! Teteng!

"Ugh, what, what the?" Oh my god.....!"

A red light flashed from the scroll and the Red Man flew towards the horizon like a baseball in a home run. Buksil stared with bemused eyes at the Red Man flying away and stuttered.

"Oh, i-it really could be triggered this way?"

It was a new method of utilizing the scrolls that had never been considered!

"Hahaha, I-I did it! Neither Ark, Shambala nor the rehabilitation group could deal with him yet I blew that monster away! As expected, the scrolls really are the strongest!"

In New World, only 10 of these rare [Banish] scrolls had been found! It was a scroll which blew the target 10 kilometres away. Yes, Buksil's secret weapon was this scroll. He had planned to use the [Banish] scroll on Ark after Magaro's legacy when found and then flee after packing all the items. However.....

"Eh? W-what have I done?"

Buksil burst out as he realised too late.

"Ugh, now I don't have a trump card to hit Ark with!"

Buksil grabbed his hair and screamed. But after a moment, Buksil acted like someone with schizophrenia and suddenly looked at Yuzuria's Heart.

"W-wait? It's not like that. There would be no way to get Magaro's legacy if the Red Man won but luckily Yuzuria's Heart is still here. And Ark died from a user so he won't revive for 24 hours. If that's the case?"

The preparations to revive the world tree were already finished. If Buksil managed to resurrect the world tree then wouldn't he monopolize Magaro's legacy? Those were Buksil's thoughts as he ran towards Yuzuria's Heart.

"Yes, once I occupy this then my plan....."

But there were some things Buksil didn't know. He needed Ark's Sacred Branch in order to restore the world tree. And there was something else.....

"Hey pig. Isn't that mine?"

"Hik, what, what, what, what.....?"

Buksil freaked out and fell on his rear as he heard the voice coming from behind him. Surprisingly, the person approaching was Ark who had died a short time ago. Yes, Ark had already died once. But no matter how strong the opponent was, Ark wouldn't die just like that. The Red Man's lightning was only focused on Ark, Shambala, Lariette and Dedric. Meanwhile, Ark had made some preparations and sent Razak escaping to somewhere far away. Thus Ark revived thanks to Razak's Pledge of Death and waited for a chance to either strike the Red Man or take Yuzuria's Heart. Then he watched as Buksil blew the Red Man away.

"Now I understand. That was the 'secret weapon' you were hiding?"

Ark narrowed his eyes and glared at Buksil. Buksil winced and shouted as Ark approached.

"Now's not the time for this! The world tree, you need to revive the world tree!"

"That's right, the world tree!"

Ark flinched and looked around. The Haman Fortress was a place of chaos as the Drakens and Nakujuk ran everywhere. The Red Man had disappeared but the fortress was still in a dangerous state.

'Now I can only believe in the world tree. I can reverse the situation if I restore Yuzuria. And even if we're defeated here, Yuzuria will still rise. There's no other choice.'

"Buksil, we'll talk about the scrolls later."

Ark grabbed Yuzuria's Heart and buried it in the soil bed. Then he also drove Yggdrasil's Sacred Branch into the bed. A pale light emerged from the Sacred Branch as the soil bed started to shake.

"That's it, it is reacting. Now.....!"

Pyorong!

A sprout grew from the soil. A sprout....no matter how he looked, it was still a sprout. Only two buds grew from the sprout. Ark stared at it but the sprout didn't change.

"What, what the? Why is it different?"

Ark raised his voice and an information window instantly appeared.

-You have planted Yuzuria's Heart in the Sacred Soil.

You have met the necessary conditions of full moon, Sacred Branch and Sacred Soil. However, Yuzuria's Heart is weaker than Yggdrasil thanks to Wigurima absorbing its power. Therefore Yuzuria needs more time to absorb the power of the Sacred Branch, Sacred Soil and full moon before it can resurrect.

<Time remaining until Yuzuria's resurrection: 2 hours>

Once something went wrong then everything would become worse. A 2 hour time limit when it was an urgent situation? Of course Ark couldn't afford to wait until then. The moon was already starting to set. The remaining time until daybreak was 20 minutes at most. If this failed then he would have to wait until the next full moon to resurrect Yuzuria. It was impossible for Haman Fortress to hold out until then.

"No way! It's impossible! Does it make sense for a world tree to have its power taken away by a monster? Just a little more power towards the bud. You can do it!"

Ark continuously used Nursing on the soil bed. It had been effective on the Sacred Soil in the past. As expected, Nursing didn't disappoint. Although Yuzuria's power was weakened by Wigurima, after he used Nursing the sprout shook and emerged a bit more.

-The growth of Yuzuria has sped up thanks to the use of Nursing.

<Time remaining until Yuzuria's resurrection: 1 hour and 55 minutes>

Although it succeeded, it only reduced the time by 5 minutes.

"Wooaaaaaak!"

"Stop them, ugh!"

Meanwhile one Baran member after another collapsed. The soldiers led by the rehabilitation members were being wiped out by the Drakens. Meanwhile, the ones

led by JusticeMan were barely holding on. Beyond the walls near the soil bed, the Nakujuk who advanced through the canyon were also getting close.

“Ark, find that bastard Ark!”

He heard Jewel and Duke’s voice from among the dust cloud.

‘God dammit, is Nursing not going to work?’

Ark’s current health was 1,500 and Lariette was dead so she couldn’t use recovery magic. The Drakens flew around looking for him at Jewel’s command. The resurrection of the world tree just became more difficult. Ark couldn’t see how it was possible in this state. Then a few Drakens rushed up behind Ark.

‘Is it going to end here?’

Tu tu tu tung!

Ark had lifted his head with a desperate look. The Drakens had been pushed back a few metres and wobbled.

“It’s Ark-nim, Ark-nim is over there!”

“Everybody help Ark-nim. Reload, fire!”

Ark looked around at the familiar voices. Ahead.....the heavily armed raccoon clan emerged from the gate holding their cannons.

“I felt like something was suspicious nyang!”

“Ark oppa!”

The group was also followed by Roco riding her unicorn.

“Oh, is it a fight?” These days I’ve been so bored playing around the village. Meow, raise your claws! I don’t know what’s going on but let’s help our friend the Truthseeker!”

“Nyahhhh!”

“Our benefactor, help Ark hyung-nim!”

Hassan and the Meow and the ex-thieves began attacking the Nakujuk.

‘How did they get to the Netherworld.....ah, that’s right!’

Ark saw the gate they came out of and understood the situation. He had used all of the remaining powder to create the dimensional gate. Even after moving the four wagons, the gate between Lancel village and the Netherworld was still connected. The residents must've seen Ark disappearing through the gate in a corner and went through out of curiosity while bringing reinforcements just in case Ark was in danger. This was possible because he had 100% intimacy with the residents of Lancel village. Even the users who came through the gate became involved with the war.

"What is this nyang? I'll give all those who fight bravely a kiss on the cheek nyang!"

"Ohhh, really?"

"An opportunity to score a kiss from Jana! Let's show them the power of cosplay enthusiasts!"

"Oh oh oh!"

"What, what the? Why do these guys have such disgusting eyes?"

The Nakujuk burst out as they saw the users. Thanks to that Ark survived the crisis, but it was only for a short time. In fact, there was a reason Ark hadn't asked the inhabitants of Lancel village to join in the war. The NPC soldiers levelled up quite slowly compared to users. The raccoons, Meow and ex-thieves were all around level 150~180. That was much lower than his level 200 pets. The Nakujuk's average level was 280 so it was impossible to make them enter the war. As Ark expected, the residents of Lancel village were quickly pushed on the defensive. While the raccoons fought from long distance and the Meow had high evasion, the ex-thieves quickly went down.

"Ah.....damn....!"

A moan emerged from Ark's mouth. He was thankful but he didn't want their help. Everything was disappearing right in front of Ark. The Baran clan, the Dark Brothers, the residents of Lancel village.....everything he had accomplished was vanishing. Now it wasn't just a problem of the Netherworld any longer. When pushed like this, Jewel's group would discover that Ark's base was Lancel village. If Jewel and the Nakujuk went through the dimensional gate then Lancel village wouldn't be able to stand against them. Unlike users, NPCs only had one life. Jana who was always teasing Ark, the funny looking Hassan, Sarah who always followed him around and Galen who always supported him.....he wouldn't be able to see them anymore. And Lancel village would return to its previous dilapidated state.

'It can't be, no, no, it can't happen!'

Ark knew the fear of losing someone better than anybody else. Ark frantically screamed down at the soil bed.

“Please, Yuzuria! You’re the world tree needed to maintain the Netherworld’s balance....right now you are needed. Please.....please wake up. Get up and help the Baran clan!”

Ark yelled in a cracking voice. Suddenly a light emerged from the Sacred Branch before the branch disappeared. At the same time, the sprout trembled and a huge world tree suddenly soared into the sky in front of him.

-The Miracle Nursing was successful.

Your heart which mourned the loss of innocent lives has moved Yuzuria. Your heart which wasn’t thinking about yourself, but others has produced a miracle. At first you only desired the resurrection of the world tree but your heart changed when you saw the numerous sacrifices. Cherishing the lives of others is the true mindset of a caretaker. Even though the effort is the same, your heartfelt commitment has moved Yuzuria.

You have cherished all lives and even moved the world tree! Due to your achievement of reaching a true caretaker’s mindset, your fame as a caretaker has increased even more.

* Due to the success of miracle nursing, all stats increase by 2.

* The Affection stat increased by 20.

*Fame increased by 200.

*Alignment to good increased by 50.

The Miracle Nursing was a success and you have acquired the title ‘Caretaker of the World Tree.’

Your fame as a Caretaker has increased, so you will receive praises from many patients.

* As a title bonus all stats will increase by 2.

* Fame will increase by 200.

His sincere prayers had achieved a miracle! The emergence of the world tree suddenly calmed the centre of the fortress.

"T-the world tree.....!"

The world tree rose through the cloud of dust and seemed to touch the moon! While everyone was watching, the image of a beautiful woman appeared in front of the world tree. The woman floating in the air smiled gently at Ark.

-The descendant of a great warrior, Ark. I have heard your prayers. You prayed for the resurrection of the world tree Yuzuria and it has been granted!

-The world tree Yuzuria has been resurrected at Haman Fortress.

The world tree Yuzuria is the sacred tree which maintains the balance of the 'Lost world=Seutandal.' Yuzuria who had lost its power and consciousness for a long time has received a new power and been resurrected.

Each of the world trees have their own attributes. Yuzuria falls under the property of the moon and brings comfort and peacefulness to women. In addition, it extends the protection to their offspring who cannot fight. As long as Yuzuria is protecting them, the Baran clan will gain the strength to withstand any adversity.

* The durability of Haman Fortress and the surrounding buildings has increased by 50%.

* The probability of being attacked by monsters around Haman Fortress has decreased by 50%.

* The defense of Haman Fortress and any villages built around has increased by 50%.

* When users and NPCs 'rest' within Haman Fortress, their recovery rate will increase by 200%.

*The fame of Haman Fortress increases by 5,000.

Indeed, the effects of a mature tree were really different from Popo who was just a seedling.

Ku ku ku ku ku!

When the world tree was revived, thick vines immediately grew along the outer walls. They were the same type of vines that protected the outer wall of Cairo. The Nakujuk were forced out beyond the walls.

-My subordinates, punish these people who have become corrupted. Iron wall divine blessing!

When Yuzuria shouted, light from the full moon headed towards the fortress. Just like a cloud of dust settling down, it sunk into the bodies of the Baran clan.

-Yuzuria has invoked the 'Glory of the Full Moon.'

Glory of the Full Moon is a special technique that uses all of Yuzuria's mana and can only be used when there is a full moon. It can't be combined with any other defense related buffs.

* The health of all allies is recovered by 50%.

* The defense of all allies will increase by 500% for 30 minutes.

* The magic resistance of all allies will increase by 300% for 30 minutes.

"Huk, defense 500%, magic resistance 300%?"

It was a really scream worthy buff. Thanks to Yuzuria's buff, the military situation immediately changed by 180 degrees.

"Now, shall we start this again?"

Ark turned his body and grinned. When the dust cloud disappeared, he was able to clearly confirm the battle situation. Most of the Nakujuk had been pushed outside by the vines but there were still hundreds of the Drakens troops remaining in the fortress. Meanwhile Jewel and Duke were surrounded by the Baran clan not far from Ark's location.

"You, you bastard.....!"

Jewel and Duke cursed when they saw him. Even though the Drakens were helping Jewel and Duke, they couldn't do anything against the Baran clan and their allies from Lancel village who had 500% defense and 300% magic resistance. In addition, the vines had divided their power in half. Ark lead the coalition of Baran=Lancel and literally stepped on them. When Jewel and Duke died, the situation became even more difficult and the Drakens ran away. The Nakujuk who were struggling against the vine wall also ran away.

"Waaaaaah, we defeated them!"

"Hooray for the Commander, hooray for Yuzuria!"

The Baran clan cheered when the Nakujuk ran away. With the situation under control, Yuzuria looked at them warmly before approaching Ark.

-Ark, thanks to you I have been able to perform the duties entrusted to me. I cannot deny that you are my benefactor. Now you are a friend of my heart so please take this token.

Yuzuria handed Ark a brilliantly shining branch from the world tree.

-Sacred Branch <Level 2> (Special)

The essence of Yuzuria has been added to the Sacred Branch.

Thanks to the addition of Yuzuria, the magic of the Sacred Branch has become even stronger. An additional bonus will be added according to Yuzuria's attributes.

<Continuous Effects for the Owner>

* Luck +30 (+30)

* The probability of succeeding all skills +10% (+5%)

* Probability of finding a magic item + 20% (+5%)

* When resting inside a house, Health and Mana Regeneration +30% (+10%)

* Addition: Defense +10%

* Addition: Remote communication with Yggdrasil and Yuzuria is possible.

'Ohhh, jackpot!'

Ark's mouth opened as he received the Sacred Branch. In fact, his heart had sunk when the Sacred Branch disappeared. He didn't know how much profit he would gain from the Netherworld but he would receive enormous damage if he lost the Sacred Branch. But it was upgraded and then returned.....from the pretty looking woman to the reward, everything was different from Yggdrasil. Ark received the Sacred Branch and the Lore quest was completed.

-The Lore Quest has been completed.

Thanks to the completion of the Lore Quest, your information window has accumulated 4 ☆s.

In New World, a ☆ is a decoration provided for the player who has achieved a historical and great achievement which has an influence on New World.

The player who receives a ☆ would become a legend in that area. In addition, the

accumulation of a certain number of ☆'s would receive a very special reward.

Currently owned ☆: 7

Then the whole Netherworld started shaking like an earthquake had occurred. A thick crack spread through the sky and it started breaking off like a snake shedding its skin. Through the gaping space in the crack, the bright dawn of the middle earth's sky could be seen. Yes, after hundreds of years the Netherworld was finally emerging from the dimensional storm towards middle earth.

"Ah, all Lancel residents return to the gate!"

The dimension gate would disappear once the Netherworld rose. He didn't know what area the Netherworld would rise to so it would be a huge problem for the residents of Lancel village. The residents and users from Lancel passed through the gate at Ark's command. Then he suddenly heard the voice of the Red Man in his ear.

-Nice move, was it Ark? It managed to end in a tie this time. I've accomplished the most important objective. But next time I won't forgive you if you step in front of me.

"What the, this bastard? Why is he saying such things while hiding?"

Ark looked around with a frown. Buksil had sent him flying and now he was rattling on. And what did he say? Next time he wouldn't forgive him? Was he a second class villain? Hiding somewhere while communicating with him.....

However Ark soon felt his breath stop. He found the Red Man riding an eagle in the sky. But it wasn't the Red Man who caused Ark to become shocked. On the other side of the wide gaping space was a huge object.

Kaaaaaaa-!

'.....A colossal skyray?

Although only a small part of its form was shown through the dimensional crack, it was unmistakably a skyray. The skyray was dozens of kilometres larger than the giant white whale Gallic that they encountered on the seabed in the past! The long tail grazed against the crack in the sky. The more surprising thing was the back of the skyray. It appeared to be carrying a huge castle three or four times larger than Haman Fortress. It looked like a legendary castle floating in the sky.....an aerial fortress.

"Hey, check the system quickly! Hurry and collect the materials for Chief Kim!"

At that time, the New World planning department of Global Exos was in chaos. New World had been quiet for a while. Then the system fell into an impossible state last night and began feeding a large amount of power to start a new episode.

-The main system has completed the data update necessary for episode III.

<Episode III: Emergence of a New Continent>

"A new continent? What on earth?"

Ha Myung-woo pulled his hair and shouted. At the same time, Kim Gwon-tae accessed dozens of computer data and turned his head.

"Boss, I've found it."

"What?"

"The reports submitted by the researchers in the early stages of making the game detail the conditions needed to trigger episode III. The new continent seems to be an area called the Netherworld. The official name is Seutandal. The place of emergence is approximately 250 kilometres in the seas bordering the Schudenberg and Bristania Kingdoms. The coordinates are X3489 Y5673."

"Do you think I haven't read the researcher's report? I already know that!"

Ha Myung-woo yelled in an annoyed voice.

"I want to know why episode III started with no warning. Just yesterday there were no signs of this. Clearly I came to ask for the reason!"

"Well the researcher's report stated that the condition for this is the completion of the Lore Quest associated with the Netherworld's world tree....."

"That's the problem. It hasn't been released yet but I've sent materials about each quarterly episode to the TV station. I told them that the next episode would be determined by the actions of users, not NPCs."

That was the reason Ha Myung-woo needed the information. It was obvious that the media would focus on that. He could predict questions about the contents of the Lore quest and Seutandal rising. The person who needed to answer those questions was Ha Myung-woo. However, Ha Myung-woo knew no more than other users. Episode III had started. It was amazing.....but that was all he knew.

'Damn, why do I always have to appear like a clown on TV?'

"Anything is good. For anything from the information site, bulletin boards or even false rumours!"

Ha Myung-woo felt like he was being bullied by the systems of New World. Then Ho Myung-hwan who had been looking at the information site shouted.

"B-Boss, I've found it!"

"What do you mean?"

"The reason why the Netherworld is rising.....I seem to have found it."

"Really? Where? Where did you find it?"

"Look at this. I'll show it on the main screen."

Ho Myung-hwan manipulated the computer and an image appeared on the 120 inch screen. It was a video that had been posted on the bulletin boards of the official site yesterday. While the managers were looking in the wrong place, a huge number of users had already watched the videos and it had reached 13,000 hits.

"Is that the Netherworld?"

The staffs of the Planning Department were users in New World as well as employees of Global Exos. They had heard rumours of the Netherworld so they all stopped what they were doing and concentrated on the video. The title of the movie was the 'Netherworld expedition of the Wicked Wolf.' Just like the title of the movie, the main character was a black wolf. As the video began, the Wolf shook its tail and started to gather ingredients in the Netherworld. But after a few moments, the contents developed into fighting dozens of red monsters.

"Ach, oh no!"

The movie has elements to please everybody such as romance and action. They screamed when a dragon like monster flew off with the carriage containing the trapped beauty and felt admiration when the Wolf was able to save her. And they all started sweating and grasped each other's hands as the boss transformed. An epic 2 hours later.....the Wolf who had overcome a large amount of adversity managed to revive the Netherworld's world tree. Thus the dimension known as the Netherworld rose to middle earth. The last scene was the handsome Wolf being surrounded by blue NPCs in middle earth while they cheered him.

“W-who is he? That Wolf?”

Ha Myung-woo asked after staring blankly at the screen. But none of the staff in the Planning Department knew who the character was. Then Ha Myung-woo shouted towards Ho Myung-hwan.

“Video, look at the video.”

“The ID says Buksil.”

“Buksil? That’s the name of the Wolf?”

“.....It can’t be. He wrote on his introduction in the bulletin board that he was a dwarf merchant from Schudenberg Kingdom.”

“Then Buksil must be the photographer. Call him now and find out the identity of the Wolf. And I don’t have to tell you this but meet him as soon as he is identified. With work of this degree, we’ll become closer to accessing the system. No matter what happens, he must be recruited to participate in the project!”

“I understand.”

Ho Myung-hwan connected to the site and examined Buksil’s information. The user had to register with their personal information in order to upload videos on the official site. Supposedly the registration was to prevent abuse of the videos, but really it was to collect the user’s information if they needed it. Using his administrator’s ID, Ho Myung-hwan was soon able to determine Buksil’s phone number.

‘There’s no way Ark is the only black wolf in New World. In addition, Ark seems eager to hide himself. There is no way he would allow a video of himself to be uploaded.

Ho Myung-hwan gave a wry smile and picked up the phone. The tone repeated several times before he heard a voice.

“Hello?”

“Oh, excuse me. I’m calling from Global Exos’ Planning Department.”

“Global Exos’ Planning Department?”

“Yes, are you Buksil who uploaded a video onto the site yesterday?”

“Yes, what about it?”

"I would like to ask you more about the main character of the movie."

"The protagonist.....are you talking about Ark-nim?"

"A-Ark?"

Ho Myung-hwan popped out of the chair at Buksil's words.

"Did you say Ark just now?"

TO BE CONTINUED

[End of Book 12]